

THE PAGEANT
OF DICKENS



CHARLES DICKENS.

Specially engraved for this work by Frank Willis, A.R.E.

THE PAGEANT OF DICKENS

BY

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With a portrait of Charles Dickens
engraved by FRANK WILLIS, A.R.F.

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TO
MRS. KATE PERUGINI
IN WHOSE FRIENDSHIP AND SYMPATHETIC INTEREST
I HAVE FOUND MY CHIEF ENCOURAGEMENT
THIS SINCERE TRIBUTE TO THE
GENIUS OF HER
FATHER
IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED.

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PREFACE.

THIS volume has been written as a result of the extremely kind reception accorded, alike by the Press and the public, to my former Dickensian work, in which I sought to analyse the social teachings and the political philosophy of the great novelist. Frankly, that book, like this, in its inception, was intended primarily for those who claim to be lovers and disciples of the great "lord of laughter and of tears." I discovered, however, that it possessed a broader appeal and a more widespread interest. Then it occurred to me that for every man who values the teachings of Dickens in regard to the economic problems of our day—and they number many thousands—there must be ten who love to read him for that superb gift of characterisation which has stood unrivalled in our literature since the age of Shakespeare. Hence this book.

To attempt merely to classify Dickens's creations would be futile if not impossible. He had, as somebody once said, "the hunger of humanity," and the range of his characters, covering as they do all sorts and conditions of men and including almost every diversity of class, profession, and occupation, is perhaps the most striking proof of his supreme genius, as it is the principal reason of his unprecedented popularity. Both are in marked contrast to the work of certain of our modern novelists, whose characters are recruited almost exclusively from a single class and whose craftsmanship is exhausted by the manipulation of half a dozen of the most morbid among them.

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With Dickens it is different. There is no novel of his whose every page is not crowded with jostling life and vibrant with reality. To read him, after perusing some of his modern successors is to leave the stuffy atmosphere of the suburban drawing-room for the bustling throng of Oxford Street, or any highway of life where we may come into contact with humanity and feel again the edge of personalities strong enough not to get blunted in the crowd.

So I have taken groups of Dickens's characters and I have tried to lead them past in orderly array—allowing them ever and anon to reveal their human foibles, to break out into exhilarating song or exuberant mirth; to pull at our heart-strings in their sorrow; to show us the gift of healing in their tears.

And as I have proceeded to examine my groups I have been conscious of a great moral purpose underlying them all. They seem to me to postulate not merely a political but an ethical philosophy as well. If not in each individual, certainly in every group, there is an arresting message which even this age would do well not to ignore. To the almost threadbare criticism that some of Dickens's characters strike us as forced, unnatural, and unreal, I answer: So also do some of the men and women whom we pass in the street or chat with in real life. Maybe the limitation is with us, and not with them. Certainly other characters which Dickens has drawn appeal instantly; move us swiftly to unrestrained humour or indignant pity, and keep always some corner of our souls that is their own. "To understand," say the French, "is to forgive," and when I hear some of

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Dickens's characters dismissed as unconvincing, I cannot help feeling that the fault lies, not with their creator, but in the failure of certain of his readers, who, numbering millions all over the globe, must necessarily include a few lacking in quick understanding or alert appreciation.

Be that as it may, it is in what I conceive to be Dickens's own spirit that I have sought to approach the Pageant in which there is apparelled every phase of our diverse humanity. [That spirit I can best describe as the one, of "generous forgiveness" which marks the child. The child is not concerned for ever to compare, to prove, to criticise, and to dissect. It goes on from adventure to adventure, from strength to strength. [Should one experience be a failure—if the day be rainy, or its nurse cross, or its playmates peevish—there are still plenty of other beautiful things to be seen and attempted in the universe which is its playground, and the dark days and the unkindness may both be forgotten.] That was the spirit in which Dickens faced life, and if he felt a man's sense of responsibility (the "artistic temperament" did not prevent him from being a shrewd man of business) he had a child's sense of fun and a child's delight in all the joy that the future holds.

Perhaps his humour, too—matchless as it has always seemed to me in the whole of literature—had something of the elfin sensibility and the delicate tenderness that marks even the most boisterous gaiety of children, who will stop their merriment the moment they are conscious of giving real pain. Dickens, at all events, laughed

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always at those who transgressed against the dignity of man and never at that dignity itself. His satire, also, was tinged with that same generous forgiveness which marks the man, who still retains within him the saving grace and virtue of his childhood.

I am conscious, even as I write, that the exposition of this warm spirit of toleration invites criticism. I shall be told that this assuredly is no time for forgiveness, and that brighter days are needed before we may intently listen to the message of Dickens. To that I answer that the qualities of the race which he described were never in more urgent request than now. The blithe and steady persistence, the sane and cheery outlook, the endurance under difficulties, above all the trust in the common man, his virtues, constancy, and capacity—these things, which Dickens perpetually emphasised, we need now more than ever; and more than ever, it seems to me, we may turn to Dickens for inspiration and support. Our real danger at this hour it seems to me, is that under the pressure of events, formidable enough to summon all our reserves of energy and endurance we may listen to the strange voices of panic and despair and lose much of the old serenity of spirit and tenacity of purpose that marked us of yore in times of peril. More than any other author, Dickens can help us to maintain our old equanimity, our old tranquil steadfastness, our surety of purpose, and buoyancy of faith.

W. WALTER CROTCH.

London, October, 1915.

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ILLUSTRATION

CHARLES DICKENS *Frontispiece*
Specially engraved by Frank Willis, A.R.E.

*Quand vos yeux en naissant s'ouvraient à la lumière.
Chacun vous souriait, mon fils, et vous pleuriez.
Vivez si bien, qu'un jour à votre dernière heure.
Chacun verse des pleurs et qu'on vous voie sourire.—*

MARQUIS DE CRÉQUY

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CHAPTER I.

THE CHILDREN.

"I love these little people, and it is not a slight thing when they, who are so fresh from God, love us."

The Old Curiosity Shop. Chap. I.

"There was once a child, and he strolled about a good deal, and thought of a number of things. He had a sister, who was a child too, and his constant companion. These two used to wonder all day long. They wondered at the beauty of the flowers; they wondered at the height and blueness of the sky; they wondered at the depth of the bright water; they wondered at the goodness and the power of God who made the lovely world.

They used to say to one another, sometimes, supposing all the children upon the earth were to die, would the flowers and water, and the sky be sorry? They believed they would be sorry. For, said they, the buds are the children of the flowers, and the little playful streams that gambol down the hill-sides are the children of the water; and the smallest bright specks playing at hide and seek in the sky all night, must surely be the children of the stars; and they would all be grieved to see their playmates, the children of men, no more."

A Child's Dream of a Star.

To Charles Dickens came the Vision of the Child. It came to him early in life, and it endured till death. He gazed upon the revelation constantly, for he realised, like Walt Whitman, that everything about the child—every influence which it exerted, every sensation which it felt—entered into him. He saw too, that, like all resurgent young life, the child was absorbent of every phase of it. Like Mytyl and Tytyl, in Maurice Maeterlinck's *Blue Bird*, [every object that dawned upon the sight of the child was laden with affinities of nature and with portents of destiny.] The early lilacs, the peep of daisies,

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the gambols of the third-month lambs, the song and nursery time of birds, the procreant urge and efflorescence of Spring-time, the passing of the storm, the loneliness of the woods and the byeways, the blue and the immensity of the sea—all these find rapid and sympathetic *rapport* with the propulsive outgrowth of every delicate fibre of its receptive being. The fairies of folklore, the traditions of mythology, the very angels themselves have declared the divinity of the Child. His nativity is the symbol of a tender and simple perfection, the promise of renewed and rejuvenated existence, the hope and sign of immortality. Every portrait of the Madonna and Child is indicative of that vague yearning of humanity for the rebirth of its own spirit and its own soul in some living stream of regeneration, expectant of some redemptive ritual of renewed joy in life more and more abundant. All art, and all religion, have clung wistfully and wonderingly to the majesty and the mystery of the Child. All the activities of man's genius have been influenced by this token of eternal rejuvenescence.

And yet the supreme paradox of human experience has been that this vision of the ideal has proved but the background and the *scena* of the real and the imperfect. Childhood, revered in sentiment and worshipped in religion, lay strewn about the byeways of life, forlorn, neglected, bruised, and beaten by contemptuous indifference or callous brutality. It was so that Charles Dickens discovered it. More vividly than his predecessors, with a pity at once more tender and more indignant than his compeers, he realised how the environment of meanness, squalor, and repression, destroyed the beauty and promise hidden in the heart of a child. He saw the Mean City with its purlieus of lurking vice and crime, and he shuddered to behold that its desolation

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entered into the life of the young, stunting its growth, sterilising its proliferation, destroying its soul. The pestilential airs and the contaminating influences of the slums rushed like a whirlwind East to West; Paul Dombey, cradled in the lap of luxury, was in equal danger with poor Jo in Tom-All-Alone's.

“Vainly attempt to think,” he remarks in one of his fine, reflective passages, “of any simple plant or flower or wholesome weed that set in this fœtid bed could have its natural growth, or put its little leaves forth to the sun as God designed it! And then call up some ghastly child with stunted form and wicked face, hold forth on its natural sinfulness and lament on its being, so early, far away from Heaven—but think of its having been conceived and born and bred in Hell! . . . Those who study the physical sciences and bring them to bear upon the health of man, tell us that if the noxious particles that rise from vitiated air were palpable to the sight, we should see them lowering in a dense black cloud above such haunts and rolling on to corrupt the better portions of a town. But if the *moral* pestilence that rises with them . . . is inseparable from them, how terrible the revelation! . . . Then should we stand appalled to know that where we generate disease to strike our children down and entail itself on unborn generations, there also we breed by the same certain process, infancy that knows no innocence, youth without modesty or shame. . . .”

It scarce needs repeating that the fount and origin of Dickens's clear and penetrative insight into the squalid realisms of the Child-life of his day dated from his own earliest experiences. There was a time in the childhood of Charles Dickens when he drifted aimlessly about the streets of London like some lost soul. What he saw in those wanderings imprinted itself indelibly upon the retina of his brain,—all the unspeakable miseries of dirt

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and poverty which beset his path then, wakened and kept for ever alert in his manhood a noble passion and an amazing tenderness. The more possibly was this the case because, prior to the tragic episode of the Marshalsea, his young days were passed in view of Gad's Hill. This eminence was a veritable Delectable Mountain in the landscape of his dreamy and ambitious fancy. It entered into him so completely that he desired to make it his very own; and, as we know, he did so in after life.

But the shadow of the Marshalsea and the squalor of the Blacking Factory fell across his path. The darkened atmosphere of this calamitous time was peopled with fugitive ghosts of children's agony and men's despair. The memory of those bitter days was ineradicable. In his later years it had its part and lot in the complete and rounded Vision of the Child. It was an experience which tempered, directed, and inspired his life-work; it was one which, in its terrifying awakening, became the nucleus of his close knowledge of the child-mind, and of his clear insight into child-consciousness and character.

As we know, however, no adversity ever completely repressed his eager and reflective spirit, nor his bounding, confident, and irrepressible gaiety. It chilled him momentarily; it weighted him with brooding thoughts, but hope did not die, nor was ambition quenched within him. On the contrary, it stirred in him a precocious interest in the pageant of London life and the humours of London character. The garish glare of the streets at night, the busy currents of traffic, the crowds, the jostlings—all infected him as it did Heine on his first visit to the Metropolis. From the snug inner recesses of the bright shops there was shed upon his childish fancy the charm of cheery and comfortable domesticity which later he never tired of extolling. In these things were the beginnings of that sympathetic curiosity and

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observance which in after years unfolded into that larger outlook of penetrative and compassionate humour, so noticeable in all he wrote, spoke, or recorded.

In his very earliest writings we note the prominence of the child in Dickens's solicitous observations of the life about him. The *Sketches* teem with them. As a young man, and in his reporting days, childhood had already become the serious and specific subject-matter of his comprehensive reflections and his exuberant literary energy. The *Sketches of Young Couples*, which are probably less familiar than those by "Boz," continue this theme. In all these swiftly-lined drawings of his literary apprenticeship, we get, not merely the humour of the child from babyhood to adolescence, but deeply serious and contemplative studies as well. That deeper and more serious note is present even in the farcical references to the "first baby," "the twins," or the "*enfant terrible*." It develops into powerful and touching pathos in realistic sketches like "The Criminal Courts," "The Prisoner's Vow," "A Visit to Newgate," or "The Drunkard's Death," in which are some heart-rending pictures of the dehumanised child and adolescent in process of fœtid growth and fungoid development.

We may smile at the philoprogenitive propensities of "The Doting Young Couple," or the vain and futile pride of his parents in the precocious Master Alexander Augustus Budden and his exquisite coruscations of grammar and spelling; we may be amused at the parental designs of the Kitterbells on behalf of their first baby, Master Frederick Charles William, upon his cross but rich bachelor Uncle, Nicodemus Dumps, who is never happy but when he is miserable. But while the faint damning of the young child is, in such sketches as these, not so pronounced as a theme of treatment, it is emphatically the object of Dickens in others to lay bare

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these hideous conditions which literally produce and manufacture the criminal, the prostitute, the drunkard, and that pitiful horde of the hindmost which the devil takes as his particular possession in this life.

What is of extreme interest from a purely artistic point of view is that in the *Sketches* we may frequently observe what are but miniature or preliminary studies of child-character. They are destined, of course, to re-emerge as more perfect and elaborate portraitures in his larger stories. In "The Criminal Courts" we get a rough first-draft, so to speak, of The Artful Dodger. He is found in embryo in the juvenile offender of thirteen, who is to be tried "for picking the pocket of some subject of his Majesty." This lad, little more than an infant, sees clearly his fate in seven years' transportation, and he expends himself in vicious *abandon* to a cloud of resistant and protective falsities:—

"*Court*: Have you any witnesses to speak to your character, boy?"

"*Boy*: Yes, my Lord; fifteen gen'lm'n is a vaten outside, and vos a vaten all day yesterday, vich they told me the night afore my trial was a-comin' on."

"*Court*: Inquire for these witnesses."

Stout Beadle perspires to find outside what the whole Court knows is not there. Child howls, declaims, vociferates injured innocence, like the old, young gaol-bird he is. Jury convicts. The Governor of the Gaol again receives his own. Prisoner will be carried rather than walk, still protesting:—

"S'elp me gen'lm'n I never vos in trouble afore— indeed my Lord I never vos. It's all a howen to my havin' a twin brother, vich has wrongfully got

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“into trouble, and vich is so exactly like me, that
“no vun ever knows the difference atween us.”

Clearly this boy is the prototype of John Dawkins, that monument of knavery, modelled in Fagin's foul kitchen, who, it will be remembered, when at last brought into Court, requested that august tribunal to tell him “What he was placed in that 'ere disgraceful sitivation for!”

The Sketches, too, contain some equally vivid pictures of girlhood, hardened apparently beyond redemption, whose destiny is foredoomed like that of Mary Warden in “The Drunkard's Death,” or the two young girls of fourteen and sixteen, Bella and Emma, in “The Prisoner's Van.” It is apparent that Dickens's power in this class of tragic sketch is just as potent as it is in those of lighter vein; and his motive as the interpreter and delineator of Childhood is certainly more impressive. As he says in “A Visit to Newgate” :—

“The thousand nameless endearments of childhood, its gaiety and its innocence, are alike unknown to them. They have entered at once upon the stern realities and miseries of life . . . talk to them of parental solicitude, the happy days of childhood and the merry games of infancy! Tell them of hunger, and the streets, beggary and stripes. . . .”

In such wise did Dickens trace for us the career, progressive in vice and crime, with its friendlessness, forlorn, unpitied and tragic *dénouement*.

In the first books of his youthful versatility, like *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby*, the child delineations assume larger proportions. Always, however, it is possible to trace the same motive; always is it expounded with the same matchless diversity,—now with sombre shades of tragedy, now in bright veins of boisterous humour. Turn wherever you will to the great humani-

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tarian novelist, and a child shall seize your imagination, evoke your laughter or your tears. The Pied Piper of Hamelin himself was not followed by a larger, noisier, jollier, or a more motley crowd of youngsters than those which sprang teeming from the creative brain of Dickens. They issue forth with bright and captivating faces, with joyous shouts and contagious spirits. They come, too, with sunken little cheeks, with dwarfed bodies, and starved minds that pathetically appeal and tug vigorously at one's heartstrings. But whether in mirth or seriousness, their antics are arrestingly delightful, their humour or their pathos are moving, and their naturalness irresistible. Dickens created for us children that *live*:—

“ Once more he stept into the street
And to his lips again
Laid his long pipe of smooth straight cane;
And ere he blew three notes (such sweet
Soft notes as yet musicians' cunning
Never gave the enraptured air)
There was a rustling that seemed like a bustling
Of merry crowds jostling and pitching and hustling,
Small feet were pattering, wooden shoes clattering,
Little hands clapping and little tongues chattering,
. . . . Out came the children running—
All the little boys and girls,
With rosy cheeks and flaxen curls,
And sparkling eyes and teeth like pearls,
Tripping and skipping, ran merrily after
The wonderful music with shouting and laughter.
* * * * *
. . . . Did I say, all? No! One was lame,
And he could not dance the whole of the way.”

Not all the Pied Piper's children passed into the Happy Hill, out of the way of the Mayor and Council and the rat-infested city. A single boy with a crutch was left outside to mourn his loneliness, his estrangement from his playmates, and the happiness of the hill itself, so near and yet so far from him:—

“ Which the Piper also promised me;
For he led us, he said, to a joyous land,
Joining the town and just at hand;
Where waters gushed and fruit-trees grew
And flowers put forth a fairer hue. . . .”

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In the same way, not all of Dickens's little children passed into the Happy Hill out of the Mean City which he beheld. In that superb galaxy of jostling and joyous youngsters there was a winsome boy and girl, each of whom had a crutch too. The sweet symbolism of Browning's Piper is immediately suggestive of Tiny Tim and little lame Jenny Wren. These maimed little ones, like Ibsen's Little Eyolf or Daudet's *petite Désirée Delobelle*, remain with us elders to remind us of our human responsibilities, and to prick us, like the Allmers of Ibsen's creation, into less selfish and more humane and enlightened views of child-life.

The world of Dickens's little people is to me very like Maeterlinck's Land of Memory—that country of departed beings to whom the word death is a meaningless thing, but who merely sleep until they are thought of or mentioned by name. Then they live and move about us in insuppressible delight and vivid reality. True it is, of course, that some of them can never be recalled but with a stab of poignant grief. The boundless affection of Dickens for his little creations, bearing the scars and wounds of an unheeding world of strife, is such that he made us behold them in their simple griefs as well as their juvenile joys. [Not all his children were happy; indeed, someone has said that no single one of them was completely so.] Even the sweet, sunny, and affectionate nature of Florence Dombey was constantly overcast by the cloud of her father's self-absorbed and shut-up heart. The clinging tendrils of her bounteous affection found their tenderest holds in her untiring devotion to Little Paul and to the simple and humble people about her. "The realism and the dreamery of life," as Swinburne would have said, are fused and mingled together with all the children of Dickens's creative fancy.

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The complaint, therefore, that Dickens did not give us a completely happy child is no challenge to his supremest art. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* was not completely happy, nor were all George Eliot's children. They breathed the lesson taught us in Longfellow's "Angel and the Child":—

"Joy hath an undertone of pain
And even the happiest hours their sighs."

Thank God that Dickens gave them all the healing gift of tears!

The fact is that Dickens's delineation of childhood carries with it a special purpose and a specific method. Like his humour, it has a glint and polish entirely its own. In the same way that pathos and comedy, laughter and tears, combine in the happiest expression of humour, so joy and sadness are blended in his child portraiture. He painted even the children's world for us as it really is,—a place where good and evil influences sit cheek by jowl, oft-times quarrelling with each other and striving for the mastery. And he bade us perceive the contributory causes of evil, and pointed perpetually to the means for fostering the growth of the good in the bounteous soil of clean human relationships and sane social conditions. Dickens believed, with Meredith, that that fiction which is the summary of actual life is Philosophy's elect hand-maiden. So we follow the life-course of his children with sympathetic and unfading interest, out of shadow into sunshine, now into sombre places of storm and stress, and then back again into the bright havens of serenity and peace.

Who does not enter with delight the humble boat-house of the hearty and noble-souled Daniel Peggotty and share the comfortable quaintness and the simple welcome of his glowing and hospitable hearth on the dunes of the sea-shore, oft with the wind and waves

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roaring outside? The freshness of the scene is entrancing; the simple and twining affections of young David and Little Em'ly at once focus our eager interest in the firelight of these pure if rugged surroundings. We follow the boy through the panorama of incident and character along the Dover Road to the neat orderly home of dear old Betsey Trotwood on the cliff. Every little episode of her half-austere, half-eccentric, yet sane and warm-hearted ministry on behalf of the driven boy is invested with a charm which is the hall-mark of faultless fiction.

In all this pageant of simple everyday circumstance, we are bound to make an instinctive comparison between the lad's sane upbringing under the tranquil and tender care of his Aunt, and the strife and ugliness of the step-father's home and the repression and desolation of Creakle's school. On again we go with him to Canterbury, where he is committed to the care of the scholarly and genial gentleness of Dr. Strong, and then into the radiant presence of Agnes Wickfield. The spell that holds us is the witchery of elemental emotions,—sensations so heroic that they stir the foundations of our souls because of their simple and prosaic truth. And throughout we are conscious of the warring, contrasting influences, tending now to mar and now to mould the budding life of the child.

✓ *David Copperfield* and *Oliver Twist* alone are a crowded canvas of a variety of types of children. Some appear in sketchy outline; some with every lineament carefully drawn, and every shade of mental character skilfully portrayed. They are studies of child-life in every hue and half-tone; indicative of every shade of benignant as well as malignant environment. At Creakle's school there is the handsome young Steerforth, "the cock of the school," a type of young egoist who warms to all

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who lionise him, but capable of infinite and heartless cruelty to those who cross his self-indulgent nature. If you examine Steerforth carefully, you will find beneath his aristocratic exterior and his engaging manners the germs of that moral stagnation so obviously manifest in his mother and her companion, Rosa Dartle. Then there is the estimable Tommy Traddles,—a facet and a fragment of Dickens himself as a boy,—the skeleton artist and general scapegoat, whose impulsive optimism impels him to draw “a whole churchyard full of skeletons” during his most sacrificial moments. There are also lads of quality like George Dimple, of Salem School, and Adams, the head boy at Dr. Strong’s.

Of girls, too, there are glimpses and glitterings galore. Dora Spenlow, the artless little being of doll-like and delicate beauty, afterwards the “child-wife” of David, who pathetically wanted to enlighten his literary labours by “holding his pens.” Then there is her friend, Julia Mills, blighted in her adolescence by precocious love experiences. And Miss Creakle, the mean offspring of a mean parent, with her secret adoration of young Steerforth. The Crewler girls make a motley variety, to say nothing of the prolific progeny of the irrepressible and glorious Micawber, whose son, Wilkins, was “the choir-boy with the head voice.” Nor must we forget the “orfling” girl named Clickett, the poor little maid from St. Luke’s Workhouse, who brought with her the chill airs of that institution and the blight of a “snorting habit,” even as Mrs. Snagsby’s girl did bring from a similar quarter the indiscriminating habit of “falling fits.” Like the girl Tattycoram (*Little Dorrit*), and Rob the Grinder (*Dombey*), both derived from institutions of cold charity, this class of Dickens’s young people frequently inherited some blight or bane, some mutilation of body

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or mind. One is reminded, too, of the idiot "child of eight-and-twenty," Maggie, Little Dorrit's special *protégée*. Dickens always limns their physical or mental idiosyncrasies, as one might conceive Phil May sketching with vivid realism "Mealy Potatoes," Mick Walker, or any of the London gutterling class.

Nevertheless Dickens's touch of compassionate humour is in every line of these delineations. The vital spark of child-humanity, so overlaid and damped down, is exposed to view and allowed to assert itself.

After a short career of untimely and lurking craftiness, the poor battered and hardened Rob is restored to human shape in the soothing service of Miss Tox; by tender and patient care the perverse and passionate Tatty is brought to a balanced and useful energy of grateful service; and so with many others too numerous to mention.

Oliver Twist presents a whole gallery of child-characters familiar enough to the Dickensian. In the masterly study of the boy himself we find the true stuff of tender yet irrepressible child-growth, passing unscathed through the baptism of fire. Swinburne professed that he found Oliver's innocence exasperating; but both in his case and in that of David Copperfield we are confident that Dickens tried to give us a type,—the type of the child resurgent,—responding amid rough and jagged ways to the sunlight which beams upon him.

Little Nell does not survive the transit of her angelic spirit through the cloud of motley and rugged humanity which constitutes the grey background of its pathetic pilgrimage. Her simple pathetic story has touched more hearts than the most polished romance the world has ever known; yet so fine and discriminative a critic as Swinburne, and so great an admirer of Dickens, too, once described Little Nell as "a monster as inhuman

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as a baby with two heads." Why he should have done so was a mystery at the time, and has remained so ever since. As against this fierce and merciless onslaught, let us set off a few of those beautiful lines of Bret Harte's wonderful tribute to the memory of Dickens, which he called "A Spray of Western Pine":—

"The roaring camp-fire with rude humour painted,
The ruddy tints of health
On haggard face and form that drooped and fainted
In the fierce race for wealth;

Till one arose, and from his pack's scant treasure
A hoarded volume drew,
And cards were dropped from hands of listless leisure
To hear the tale anew.

And then, while round them shadows gathered faster,
And as the firelight fell,
He read aloud the Book wherein the Master
Had writ of "Little Nell."

* * * * *

The fir trees gathered close in the shadows,
Listened in every spray,
While the whole camp, with "Nell" in English meadows
Wandered and lost their way.

And so in mountain solitudes—o'ertaken
As by some spell divine—
Their cares dropped from them like the needles shaken
From out the gusty pine."

That surely is the final test alike of the glory and the immortality of Little Nell!

Akin to her, was little Paul Dombey, whose gentle and attenuated soul faded like the light of a summer's eve, in

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the chill atmosphere of a loveless luxury and the presence of a purblind parent.

In these children Dickens gave us a revelation of the child-soul, clinging, confident, loving, guileless; interrogating the great world into which it is wonderingly born, responding eagerly to the glow of homely and sheltering good-will and affection, from wherever it may come; knowing no distinctions of class or character, nor coarseness, nor rough exteriors, nor humble callings, but only those which present themselves as facets of our common human sympathies. David's deep regard for Peggotty and her family survived into his cultured and prosperous manhood. Next to his sister Florence, little Paul turned to the motherly Polly Toodle on his death-bed. Florence herself willingly and confidently placed her trust and her affection in the simple, honest, and protecting care of the old sea-captain, Cuttle. Little Nell surely exemplified the truth of the old saying: "*A little child shall lead them.*"

Dickens elevates the child amidst the beauty and the lowliness of our common affections and our domestic humanities. As a lad he saw, despite his own agony of poverty, mostly the brightest and best side of the life amongst which he drifted in the streets of London. At least he invested all that he saw with some glamour of romantic fancy to appease the almost insatiable cravings of his ambitious imagination. Even as Oliver only partially, dimly, and confusedly understood the iniquity through which he was dragged, so Charles Dickens himself only faintly perceived the deep significance and the reality of the things through which he passed *until he grew up*. It is quite true, as he himself tells us, that he had flashes of very keen understanding of things that should have been beyond his ken. For instance, he knew instinctively that the lady who lived

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with Captain Porter, of the Marshalsea, was not his wife. "It would be difficult," he remarked, in *The Uncommercial Traveller*, "to overstate the intensity and accuracy of an intelligent child's observation." But without the shadow of a doubt he was drawn to the attractive and humane side of the humblest, as is every child where good-will and homely affection manifest themselves.

There is, in fact, a curious and very remarkable characteristic about Dickens which is transferred to nearly all his creations. The spirit of the child lived in him to the end. It was transfused through all his men, and his women even. His little ones grow up; but, like Peter Pan, they remain children always. David Copperfield's love of the faithful Peggotty had all the freshness of the child, even in his manhood. Their sentimental relationship was an idyll of perfect trust and understanding. Similarly David seemed to expect the grown-up Traddles, who became a judge, to be for ever drawing skeletons. The girlhood of Esther Summerson perpetually suffuses her sweet womanliness. The specific characteristics of the child, as all Dickensians will admit, are the marked features alike of Mr. Dick and Barnaby Rudge. In short, the simple, robust, and unsophisticated spirit of childhood, was the basic pattern and the essence of all Dickens's best delineations, and it is for that reason they are presented to us with bubbling optimism. The commonest and lowliest affections and sympathies in their pristine forms were for him the levelling factors in human nature. They were the grains of gold sparkling star-like in the rough quartz,—the glittering diamonds amid the dross of life. Examine carefully all the really adorable men and women of Dickens, whose names come tripping into the memory, and see whether the best part of them are not just those faculties and qualities which they share with the child. The child-

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humanities were the fount of Dickens's inspiration, and certainly they were the basis of his democratic faith. The true way to surmount class barriers and class distinctions is, as he everywhere shows us, not to point to them, still less to denounce them, but, as Mr. Chesterton says, *to ignore them as little children ignore them.*

We may realise, even more perfectly, how Dickens insists on this truth,—how not only does he give us sketches of child-life itself, but even links up his adult characters with their childhood by turning to the Christmas books. Take *A Christmas Carol* for example. Having presented us with a veritable ogre of hardness and meanness in Old Scrooge, he transports us to a ghostly atmosphere, and shows us the origin of the miser's nature in pictures of his battered and neglected boyhood. "The Ghost of Christmas Past" appears and appeals to us and to Scrooge in the form of a child. We all remember how this poor old husk of humanity is moved and chastened by the imperious calls of the Ghost, who, like Virgil in Dante's poem, conducts him through the purg-ing Hades of his past life, from that time when he stole the delights, which all children share, from fairy tales. Confronted with fragments of his dead self the revelation finally induces in him a great child-like joy, which quickens his moral blood, dissolves his morbid humours, and re-creates in him a proper conception of good and evil, joy and sorrow. A child-like glee and generosity pervades his soul, and out of the energy of it unfolds the will and the resolution to all charitable things. And the regenerating and rejuvenating power of it all has its source in the magical memory of childhood. It seems that in this story is teaching which all may appreciate. It is this: In mean self-absorption, we, like Scrooge, are in imminent danger of losing our real and higher self,—that self which should be safely

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anchored by the bonds of living memory to the simple joys and the purity of childhood. Without this anchorage, the symmetry and the continuity of our growing and unfolding selfhood becomes blurred and indistinct. It can only ripen and come to full fruition in those joys associated with the child *in* us and the children *about* us. The joys of childhood find their replica in parenthood. Dickens romped like a child with his children. And the picture of the poor but happy Cratchit family, with Tiny Tim and his romping father, rounds off and completes the teaching of the *Carol*.

As for the element of assailing evil, this troubles us mainly in its subjective entanglements. Like Scrooge, we meet with its sore afflictions so long as we meanly lurk in the narrow self-sphere of our own lower nature. As for the objective evil, Dickens clearly shows that without its presence we may never know the good. "Everything in our lives," he says in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, "whether good or evil affects us most by contrast." And he everywhere reminds us with Shakespeare that—

"There is some soul of goodness in things evil;
Would men observingly distil it out."

Children are always a prominent feature of Dickens's Christmas Stories. These Stories are often, in fact, the atmospheres created for the play and display of the child-mind in its varied attitudes and settings. What a beautiful and convincing touch of child delineation, for example, is contained in *The Holly Tree Inn*! All will remember the elopement of Nora and Master Harry Walmers, Junr., a bright lad of tender years, who falls in love with his little cousin and starts for Gretna Green to be married to her. There are those who have regarded this story as far-fetched and beyond the realm of credulity, but to me the picture is perfect in its delicate humour and its complete presentation of the psychology of a child.

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Take, again, *Doctor Marigold*. In that story Sophy, the deaf and dumb girl whom the travelling "cheap-jack" adopts, is seen to grow from a poor vacant-minded waif into a bright, cultured and affectionate young woman, who afterwards presents him in his caravan with a real talking cherub of a foster grand-child, notwithstanding her marriage to a deaf mute. It is a story significant of Dickens's own earnest conviction that the influences of heredity, strong as they are, can be checked, disciplined and controlled; and sometimes, one is tempted to hope, entirely obviated by the application of the principles of humanity and the tender ministry of warm-hearted affection. What is *George Silverman's Explanation* but a study of the mind-life of a boy and man as a transition through sordid childhood to a strangely defecated asceticism in manhood?

Barbox Brothers, too, is the romance of a brooding and desolate man, awakened and transformed by the prattle of a lost child which proves to be the offspring of the woman he once loved. His happy intercourse with Phoebe, the bedridden girl of "Lamps," the Mugby Junction porter, completes his cure, and demonstrates how a gentle, affectionate and contented disposition suffices to avert all assailing trouble and to dissipate all brooding thoughts which warp the mind and canker the heart. The boy Ezekiel, at Mugby, is a true Dickens portrait of the presiding genius of a railway refreshment room that "never yet refreshed mortal being."

The Chimes is another instance of the vivid atmosphere in which the Child walks,—mute, but pathetically appealing—amid the coarse, crass, and forbidding ebullience of the Alderman Cutes and other self-important governors. These are the self-satisfied egoists whose mission in life is to put all "draggle-tailed" mothers and babies down.

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With some difficulty one refrains from quoting the coarse Aldermanic speech to the sunny little Meg Veck,—she who was the one radiant, pure, and gleeful sunbeam aslant her father's hard and wintry life, and he a true child in his gaiety and simplicity of soul when she was near. To Alderman Cute the appeal of the babe was a thing to be firmly, and, if need be, brutally stamped out; but for the simple, kindly, and child-like Trotty Veck, the ticket-porter of the wind-swept church, it was the holiest of calls, for the Spirit of the Child was *with* him and *in* him. It was the gift of the Chimes. It brought him, like Scrooge, wonderful and enduring visions. "Thank God!" cried Trotty. "Oh, God, be thanked! She loves her child." And this was the one triumphant note of this humble soul, when in a dream—only a dream—he had suffered the direst calamity that a fond father can suffer in an erring daughter. I have read and re-read this Christmas fancy many times, and yet each reading brings some fresh revelation of the great depths of humanity reposing in the soul of Dickens, and some new evidence of the unrivalled power he possesses to teach the profoundest truths of life and the supremest triumphs of love.

"It must be somewhere written," says Dickens in *Bleak House* "that the virtues of mothers shall occasionally be visited on the children as well as the sins of the fathers." And he saw that even the erring mother was to be redeemed by love for her child. How many souls of mother and child might have been saved alive if we all saw, as Trotty Veck saw, in the great love and tribulation of his simple heart!

Like Whitman, Dickens caught a vision of the baby-soul of man emerging "out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking"; and, with Whitman, he cried, in effect:—

"I see the sleeping babe nestling the breast of its mother—
The sleeping mother and babe—hushed, I study them long and long."

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In the *Haunted Man* there is enunciated the same idea of the child as the source of salvation to the grown-up, and there is presented that curious and mysterious comingling of both their psychological properties in the constituents of a happy and perfect existence. Moreover, there is depicted the same attitude towards the problems of Evil: we are shown how everything in our lives affects us most, how it tends towards the best, by virtue of the contrast and the necessary antithesis of good and evil. In this story the central figure is a gloomy scientist—a misanthrope—who has evolved the theory that the only way to happiness is to blot out the memory of sorrow. In the preoccupation and absorption of his philosophical pursuits he has neglected to cultivate and preserve the common affections and humanities of domestic man. He is friendless; he possesses no ties of relationship or kin. There is no love in life to anchor his drifting and disconsolate soul in its wandering reflections; he has nothing in common with the crowd of happy people who constitute his environment. Theirs is the peace which arises from gratitude, from simple and tranquil joys, and the memories of past delights, even when they are tinged with sorrow; but to him it is all false and futile,—it serves but to feed the vanity which has conceived the notion that only by the obliteration of all memory of wrong and pain and tribulation can evil be banished.

He conjures up the spirit which sweeps over the waters of Lethe; he drinks deep of nepenthe; he is granted the gift of oblivion, and his morbid remembrances die, but the gift itself becomes the torture of his soul. He suffers the horror of contaminating all he touches with the virus of his own afflicted mind. Redlaw, the scientist, to his own unspeakable horror, becomes the murderer of all that is best and tenderest about him. It is the fateful Nemesis of the gift which the Ghost has granted him.

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The sin of ingratitude, the selfishness of discontent and petulance, of callousness, of moroseness, beset all the hitherto happy folk who surround him. Love dies; joylessness, ill-will, and mean passions take its place.

The story bristles with child portraiture in the familiar Dickensian vein of alternating humour and pathos. The tragedy of the baby-savage of the slum-gutter; the humour of the much-enduring Johnny Tetterby and the Moloch of a baby, which makes his life a burden and a sacrifice, nevertheless so cheerfully and affectionately borne; all the domestic incidents of the humble Tetterby family focus that irresistible interest which Dickens, almost alone, was able to compel.

But the power as well as the crux of the story lies in the strange and tragic symbolism of the nameless and stunted gutterling, which pulls the sleeve, so to speak, of the philosopher whichever way he turns. The reflective reader, at last penetrates to the heart and meaning which Dickens intended to convey. *The child in Redlaw is dead; its replica and its representation is projected objectively out of him.* "A bundle of tatters held together by a hand in size and form almost an infant's, but in its greedy clutch a bad old man's. A face rounded and smothered by some half-dozen years, but pinched and twisted by the experiences of life. Bright eyes, but not youthful. Naked feet—beautiful in their childish delicacy—ugly in the blood and dirt that cracked upon them. A baby savage, a younger monster, a child who had never been a child, a creature who might live to take the outward form of a man, but who within would live and perish a mere beast."

Without doubt this wonderful but tragic baby character is at once a real *dramatis persona* and a living symbol. This child-horror, this perverted human, is the outcome and the product of neglected humanities. " " And

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this,' said Redlaw, gazing on him with increasing repugnance and fear, 'is the only one companion I have left on earth.' " Passing strange, too, is it not, that this being was the only one who was proof against the moral contamination of his ghostly gift? Whichever way the story be examined, what *motif* has it but to propound the doctrine of the eternal resurrection of life—the constant reproduction of all that child-life brings and means? "Lord, keep my memory green";—that is the human cry for immortality, and under it throbs the living principle upon which men in all ages have strung the pearls of glowing retrospect and radiant reminiscence.

Redlaw, in his abysmal remorse, implores for pity, whilst the baby savage slept at his feet as if yet parentally attached to him and mutely awaiting the pangs of re-birth. The Ghost speaks. It is the spectre which dramatically admonishes and reveals the truth. Pointing to the stunted and battered remnant of humanity he shows how no softening influence of sweet melancholy, nor joyous reminiscence, nor humanising touch, can enter where the child in us and around us is forsworn or neglected. It is indubitable that Charles Dickens wanted us to realise that it is good always for us to recall our simplest and most distant joys, for in their remembrance even present wrongs may be subdued and we may attain the highest and most glorious attribute of a generous *forgiveness*. That, it seems to me, was the message he conveyed in that wonderful soliloquy in *Hard Times*, which runs:—"The dreams of childhood—its airy fables; its graceful, beautiful, humane, impossible adornments of the world beyond, so good to be believed in once, so good to be remembered when outgrown, for then the least among them rises to the stature of a great Charity in the heart, suffering little children to come into the midst of it and to keep with their pure

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hands a garden in the stony ways of this world, wherein it was better for all the children of Adam that they should oftener sun themselves, simple and trustful, and not worldly-wise. . . .”

CHAPTER II.

THE HUMOURISTS.

“It is a fair, even-handed, noble adjustment of things, that while there is infection in disease and sorrow, there is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good humour.”—

A Christmas Carol. Stave 3.

THE association of names with ideas is probably the simplest mental process known to mankind. If we think of Macaulay, Gibbon, or Buckle, we immediately receive a suggestion of the historic. We speak of Darwin or Spencer, and our minds instinctively turn to the idea of evolution. We recall Swinburne's wealth of gorgeous imagery or Watson's unvarying majesty of diction, only to find our thoughts attuned to a sense of cosmic vastness, and our souls awakening to a realisation of eternal truths.

In the same way, if we mention the name of Dickens, we observe that a suggestion of his humour is the primary emotion provoked in our auditor. Let his magic name be whispered to the first uninformed man in the street, and witness whether the uppermost thought is not of Pickwick. Of course, Dickens's humour was larger and broader than even the lively farce of the *Pickwick Papers*. As a matter of fact, we never quite escape it. The theme of his story may partake of the darker hues and shades of tragedy, but the humour is there nevertheless. Moreover, it is a thing *sui generis*. It seems to mark Dickens off from all other novelists before or after.

There are people, not unversed in classical fiction, who always speak of Thackeray in the same breath as Dickens. Why, it is somewhat difficult to fathom.

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Thackeray himself recognised some quality in Dickens's genius which he frankly envied, and which he also averred distinguished him from any other writer of their time. Some critical admirer of Byron once said that he misapplied his great talents to glorify a fierce and magnificent misanthropy. Thackeray, too, created an impression of perpetual pessimism. It was *The Times* of his day which accused the creator of Becky Sharp of being, howbeit a writer of considerable parts, a dreary misanthrope who saw the sky above him green instead of blue, and nought but sinners around him. "So we all are," replied the much-wronged novelist, in vindication of himself, "so in every writer and reader I have ever heard of; so was every being who trod this earth, save One. I cannot help telling the truth as I see it, and describing what I see. To describe it otherwise than it seems to me would be falsehood in that calling in which it has pleased Heaven to place me; treason to that conscience which says that men are weak; that truth must be told; that faults must be owned; that pardon must be prayed for; and that love reigns supreme over all."

But Thackeray, despite his outlook on life, could yet sincerely appreciate the sparkling humour with which Dickens enlivened a drab world. One of the finest tributes one author ever paid another will be found in that stately lecture in which Thackeray extolled almost to the point of adulation the books and characters of Dickens. "One might go on," he said, "though the task would be endless and needless, chronicling the names of kind folk with whom this kind genius has made us familiar. Who does not love the Marchioness and Mr. Richard Swiveller? Who does not sympathise, not only with Oliver Twist, but his admirable young friend, the Artful Dodger? Who has not the inestimable advantage of possessing a Mrs. Nickleby

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“ in his own family? Who does not bless Sairey Gamp
“ and wonder at Mrs. Harris? Who does not venerate
“ the chief of that illustrious family who, being stricken
“ with misfortune, wisely, and greatly turned his atten-
“ tion to ‘Coals’—the accomplished, the Epicurean, the
“ dirty, the delightful Micawber? I may quarrel with
“ Dickens’s art a thousand and a thousand times; I
“ delight and wonder at his genius; I recognise in it—I
“ speak with awe and reverence—a commission from that
“ Divine Beneficence, whose blessed task we know it will
“ one day be to wipe every tear from every eye. Thank-
“ fully I take my share in the feast of love and kindness
“ which this gentle and generous and charitable soul has
“ contributed to the happiness of the world. I take and
“ enjoy my share, and say a Benediction for the weal.”

In his contributions to the sum total of human happiness, Dickens seemed to employ two sets of characters. The first are humourous, without being humourists; the second are humourists because they expound naturally the philosophy from which all humour springs. It is sometimes a little difficult to appreciate the distinction, but it exists nevertheless.

For example, most people who have read Dickens superficially, though maybe extensively, would deride the idea that there is any difficulty in selecting the humourists from the multitude of characters that crowd the stage of his sketches, short tales, and novels. Any attempt to demur is countered with the stunning enquiry, “Were not the bulk of Dickens’s creations presented to his readers in some form or phase of humour?” And one is perforce obliged to admit that this is true. Many of them, of course, are set in an atmosphere of romping fun, roaring laughter, and extravaganza of episode, as in *Pickwick Papers*. Some are set in an exquisitely droll pose, like Silas Wegg, the unconsciously

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comic street-stall merchant and ballad vendor. Some are set in a comical attitude of bombast and bathos, like Chadband or Honeythunder. Some are set to a mood of irony like the nicely differential but worldly Dean in *Edwin Drood*, whose fine hypocrisy makes us smile at its obviousness. Some possess the sheer burlesque or *travestie* of character, like Stiggins. Some strut the stage in the serio-ludicrous style, like the great pseudo-moralist, Pecksniff. Some are conceived in the spirit of pure and candid comedy, like Mr. Micawber. Some have a vein of dry and cynical humour, like Bucket the Detective, or the Artful Dodger; and some are shown in patho-humourous vein, like Miss Flite, or Mr. Dick, or Mr. John Chivery, or little, lame Jenny Wren. These latter creatures of Dickens are pervaded with that sort of humour which evokes a tinge of pity or calls forth a tear under the cover of a smile.

But can it be said that these are all humourists? They are humourous. They evince humour. But are they humourists? Because they, in some way or other, provoke a smile, a chuckle in the throat, a broad grin, or a fit of uproarious laughter, as the case may be, are they *per se* humourists?

Is it true to say that Winkle or Snodgrass are humourists because they cut comical figures in more or less farcical situations and episodes? Is Chadband a humourist because he raises a laugh by his ludicrous but hypocritical and sloppy lip-canting? Is Stiggins a humourist by virtue of his red visage, his pokey and perforated gloves, his abbreviated trousers, and his baggy-waggy umbrella? Is Honeythunder a humourist because of his thunderous voice, his exaggerated portliness, and his ludicrous doctrines of philanthropy—all of which make us grimly smile? Or is Mrs. Pardiggle, with her numerous and funny family, and her patronising propa-

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ganda of "strait-waistcoat" benevolence, a humourist? Can that poor, half-witted Miss Flite, with her perky and bird-like ways, and her knowing notions about the law, and her jumpy little mannerisms and politenesses, be a humourist? Was Mrs. Gamp, with her bibulous habits and her sage views of lying-in nursing, a humourist? Is even the perpetually cheerful and irrepressible optimist Mark Tapley a humourist? All these personages of Dickens evoke laughter, in all the degrees and nuances of risibility; but, for all that, they cannot actually be classed as Dickens's humourists.

It may be asked, what is the particular quality that makes some of Dickens's humourous characters humourists? Broadly speaking, they are humourists who are *consciously* humourous: more particularly speaking it is those who assume some form or phase of his humourous outlook on life and people. Probably no single character which he created approximated this quite so closely as he did himself. But some were certainly incarnations of many of his points of view. The large-hearted and generous-minded Mr. Pickwick was probably as near as any. And he is singled out as the first illustration because he had a strong sense of humour combined with very active humanitarian sentiments.

It was in 1837, at the age of twenty-four, that Dickens stamped his name on the annals of satire and humour through the *Pickwick Papers*. From this time forth may be traced the unfolding of his gift in its many protean phases. Here, however, we see it rock-based on those native animal spirits and warm good-nature to which those who knew him personally always testify. *Pickwick* embodies its free, unrestrained, and unalloyed expression. It is on this that he rose balloon-like into prominence, by the sheer buoyancy of his fun and hilarity. Amid it all, however, his purpose stealthily peeps out. He desired

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always to stir the people to personal and social reforms, and he perceived that, through the moving power of humour, he could the better draw men to reflect on life and its shortcomings. And he studiously modelled his great gifts to that high moral end.

Critics may urge that the writer of these lines is merely colouring Dickens's characterisations with his own views and notions. Quite sincerely, this is explicitly disavowed. The diligent student of Dickens will recognise that humour, as he found it, is something much nobler than the art of raising a laugh at the common incongruities and inconsistencies of life, and much higher than mere empty revelry. The more obvious and vulgar manifestations of the comic are frequently the falsest kind of humour. Behind the laugh and the joke there should be some humanistic quality if it is to possess the high characteristic of real humour. Genial wit and humour are the true and faithful servants of wisdom: it is the compound which constitutes the genuine article. No man can be a humourist who is not a humanist; for the humanist is the seer of mankind *as a whole*. It is only the large vision of human relationships which gives men a sense of proportion, and that sense is clearly an integral part of the sense of humour. From that high altitude of humanitarian outlook, life presents itself as a mosaic of the sublime and the ridiculous, the grotesque and the pathetic, the harmonious and the incongruous, the rational and the inconsequent, the peccant and the normal, the melancholy and the humourous, whose "blood and judgment," as Hamlet said, "are all commedled."

Meredith finely expresses this idea. He says:—"If you believe that our civilisation is founded in common sense (and it is the first condition of sanity to believe it), you will, when contemplating men, discern a

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“ Spirit overhead. . . . It has the sage’s brows, and
“ the sunny malice of a fawn lurks at the corners of the
“ half-closed lips drawn in an idle wariness of half ten-
“ sion. That slim feasting smile shaped like the long-
“ bow, was once a big round satyr’s laugh, that flung
“ up the brows like a fortress lifted by gunpowder. The
“ laugh will come again, but it will be of the order of
“ the smile, finely tempered, showing sunlight of the
“ mind, mental richness rather than noisy enormity. Its
“ common aspect is one of unsolicitous observation, as if
“ surveying a full field and having leisure to dart on its
“ chosen morsels, without any fluttering eagerness.
“ Men’s future upon earth does not attract it; their
“ honesty and shapeliness in the present does; and when-
“ ever they wax out of proportion, overblown, affected,
“ pretentious, bombastical, hypocritical, pedantic, fan-
“ tastically delicate; whenever it sees them self-deceived
“ or hoodwinked, given to run riot in idolatries, drifting
“ into vanities, congregating in absurdities, planning
“ short-sightedly, plotting dementedly; whenever they
“ are at variance with their professions, and violate the
“ unwritten but perceptible laws binding them in con-
“ sideration to one another; whenever they offend sound
“ reason, fair justice; are false in humility and mined
“ with conceit, individually, or in the bulk—the spirit
“ overhead will look humanely malign and cast an oblique
“ light upon them, followed by volleys of silvery
“ laughter. This is the comic spirit.”

Who can read that passage without picturing to him-
self Charles Dickens looking humanely down on all our
follies and foibles, all our posing and framing, and all
the evils in our national institutions and conventions
which arise out of our own inconsistencies, hypocrisies and
inanities? Who can read or think of these things with-
out seeing Dickens in this attitude of Meredith’s, looking

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on "humanely malign," and, with set purpose, placing characters and circumstances so as to bring men to enlightenment and self-realisation in the bracing atmosphere of the comic? Certain it is that some of the follies of personal character and some of the evils of public institutions and conventions have melted away under its genial influence.

That Dickens was the veritable embodiment and personification of the comic spirit may be seen in his thorough enjoyment of his own humorous creations. In a letter to Lord Lytton he once said: "I have such an expressible enjoyment of what I see in a droll light, that I daresay I pet it as if it were a spoilt child." And in a letter to Forster he wrote: "I can report that I have finished the job I set myself, and that it has in it something—to me at all events—so extraordinarily droll that though I have been reading it some hundred times in the course of the working, I have never been able to look at it with the least composure, but have always roared in the most unblushing manner. I leave you to find out what it was." This was the episode of Major Jemmy Jackman and the Tax Collector, to which reference will be made later.

Similarly, it is not difficult to imagine Dickens quietly chuckling as he recounted the doings, and repeated the quaintly philosophic sayings, of Sam Weller. It must have been remarked by the casual observer that those sayings, topsy-turvey as they generally were, and sometimes perversely crooked, were frequently very much to the point. Sam's knowledge of human nature was wide and deep—for his upbringing. And his father, Tony Weller, "the old 'un," as Sam fondly called him, was also a philosopher in his way, and he relates, with ponderous but real pride, how he, purposely and with native foresight, provided for his son's education: "I took a

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“great deal of pains with his eddication, sir; let him run the streets when he was young and shift for hisself. It’s the only way to make a boy sharp, sir.” Dickens himself received his earliest, sharpest, and most forcible lessons of human nature from roaming the streets, and continued always to study life and character from the same vantage-ground rather than from books.

We get something of the real Dickens spirit in both Sam and his worthy parent. Tony Weller, like the now extinct London ’bus-driver, was quite remarkable for his homely philosophy. His daily contact with an innumerable variety of people made him so. His view of his own troubles with “widders” was taken in the very best sense of humour. Speaking of his ventures with widows, he says: “I’ve done it once too often, Sammy; I’ve done it once too often. Take example by your father, my boy, and be very careful o’ widders all your life, especially if they keep a public-house.” He was thinking of Stiggins. He generally delivered these self-inflicted sallies with a great deal of pathos and a portentous wink. And the only time his philosophic spirit broke down into alarm and anger was just after the death of Mrs. Susan Weller, of the Marquis of Granby, and he was thus once more a widower, the fair game of all widows—fair, fat, and otherwise. Tony was then found by his dutiful son solemnly cogitating by the fireside in a cloud of smoke, and shrouded in a huge background of hatband: it was the day of the funeral. He was in that abstracted and contemplative mood which he conceived as a “referee.” Being once again in the perilous position of a lonely widower, it opened a wide prospect of conjecture and reflection. Memories of his late wife’s good qualities were uppermost. Why not? After all the little marital “jars,” she died in contrition. She saw, relates Tony, that, “if a married ’ooman vishes to be reli-

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“gious, she should begin by dischargin’ her dooties at home, and makin’ them as is about her cheerful and happy, and that vile she goes to church or chapel, or what not, at all proper times, she should be very careful not to con-wert this sort of thing into a excuse for idleness or self-indulgence.” Tony was very affected by this confession, and discoursed upon it with numerous slow and sad shakes of his head through the smoke and hat-band.

“Vell, governor, ve must all come to it one day or other. . . . There is a Providence in it all.”

“Of course there is,” replied his father, with a nod of grave approval. “What ’ud become o’ the undertakers without it, Sammy?”

There was a buxom widow at the back of his chair the next moment, a ministering angel, with all the arts of a Mrs. Gamp, desirous of keeping his heart up in his melancholy with a cup of tea! And Tony’s ponderous philosophy at once evaporates into choler—a thing to which his portly, over-clothed, good nature was not often addicted. He apologises for it to his fond and dutiful son: “The breath was scarcely out of your poor mother-in-law’s body [meaning his step-mother’s] ven vun old ’ooman sends me a pot of jam, and another a pot of jelly, and another brews a blessed large jug of camomile tea vich she brings in vith her own hands.” And he consequently has a suffocating sense of being somewhat overcrowded by sympathetic “widders”!

But we all like the stout old coachman. His stodgy, stressful, but good-humoured view of his own difficulties, his pleasantly stoical and breezy disposal of them, his insight into human nature—grotesquely limited in some respects, but sound in so many ways—all confidently communicated with a “whole alphabet of winks” and savouring of the lofty outlook of the driver’s seat—all

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these things make it good to know him as one of nature's humourists. Most philosophers have their weak points. Tony's was "widders," not to mention "shepherds." Like Dickens, he saw through the ways and wiles of "shepherds" with the womenfolk, and their subscriptions for "flannel veskits for young niggers as don't want 'em." But it must be admitted that Tony's sense of humour broke down when in contact with these evils in the innermost recesses of his private and domestic life! The domestic circle is generally where humour finds a modest sphere for its play and good purpose. We all generally manage to smile good-humouredly at the minor mischances and discomfitures within the radius of domestic privacy. The widow, the mother-in-law, and the wife of rugged angles, have been perpetual themes for humour. The Hebrew of old no doubt found a crumb of comfort in the text from Ecclesiasticus: "As climbing up a sandy way is to the feet of the aged, so is a wife full of words to a quiet man." We can see the quiet man absorbing the humour of this simile, and joining in a smile of gratitude for the comforting suggestion of community in marital troubles. Tony Weller was a man of quiet reserve, who could wink at many things; but when roused by "shepherds" and "widders" his "humour" was volcanic.

Sam Weller was a true humourist and a staunch one. There is no better in all fiction; unless it be Doctor Mari-gold in one of the *Christmas Stories*. But Sam and his parent stand out amid all the *travestie* of *Pickwick* as separate and distinct types of character. The faithful serving man, and cheerful wit and jester, is never presented in an extravagant situation: it would not suit his true Cockney humour: the dignity of it would be ruffled into ultra-farce. How we roar at his attitude in the witness-box during the great breach of promise

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case! How steady and true he is to the interests of his adored master, and how keen his wits against those of the stupid Law! There is here no caricature, no antic, no buffoonery, no capering; nothing is overdone. And yet how we laugh as Sam gives his evidence with inimitable wit and imperturbable ambiguity. He appears to be a character who *stands in Dickens's shoes*, and plays off a phase of the humour which was felt by the master himself.

Dickens was, of course, never happier than when tilting at the stupidities of the Law; and it is obvious that when Sam Weller was in the witness-box Dickens enjoyed himself as immensely as did his immortal character. Swinburne realised this when he said that Sam Weller and Charles Dickens came to life together, immortal and twin-born.

In that magnificent chapter where Sam is introduced to the reader we have a finely-conceived situation with Sam as the controlling comic spirit, and Pickwick himself as the presiding philosophic humourist. It will be remembered that Sam is "boots" at the old hostelry, the White Hart Inn, High Street, Borough, where we first see him distributing the trophies of his calling to their several wearers, and speculating on the monetary return in tips for the day. Alfred Jingle, that superb and subtle actor-adventurer, is in hiding with Miss Rachel Wardle, the spinster of doubtful age, majesty in her eye, and touch-me-not-ishness in her air. The elopement is verging on the marriage at Doctors' Commons by special licence, with Pickwick and Wardle, the lady's brother, hard on the scent. Sam is asked for information as to where Doctors' Commons is, and, with his native Cockney penetration, divines the situation.

And there is a nice humour in the story of his father's capture by a "widder" at the same address; Sam

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running on, to use his own words, like "a new barrow with the wheel greased." The upshot of it all is that Sam manœuvres the whole party with exquisite humour and lively relish. He brings the hunters and their quarry *vis-à-vis*. With tact and insight, he prevents undue uproar, saves Mr. Pickwick from the consequences of rashness, and pockets his reward with quiet satisfaction: it is altogether a sight for the gods.

Mr. Pickwick at first looks on with the benign eye of an observant philosopher; now repressing a smile at Sam's deftness and wit, now silently indignant at the swaggering Jingle. In this humanely-alert, note-taking, good-humoured, elderly gentleman, we seem to see the shade of Dickens's own on-looking personality. He literally glows with the suffused radiance of a triumphant yet restrained mirth, until a shaft of scornful satire from the entrapped Jingle brings the flash of indignant fire to eyes which would seem to melt the very glasses of his spectacles. The arrow was winged with feathery lightness, and pointed and barbed with the gall of mocking contempt: it was flung with precision, and it got home. "Mr. Pickwick was a philosopher, but philosophers are only men in armour after all. The shaft had reached him, penetrated through his philosophical harness to his very heart. In the frenzy of his rage he hurled the inkstand madly forward and followed it up himself. But Mr. Jingle had disappeared, and he found himself caught in the arms of Sam.

"'Hullo!' said that eccentric functionary, 'furniter's cheap where you come from, sir. Self-acting ink, that 'ere, it's wrote your mark upon the wall, old gen'lm'n. Hold still, sir; wot's the use o' runnin' arter a man as has made his lucky'"

"Mr. Pickwick's mind, like those of all truly great men, was open to conviction. He was a quick and

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“powerful reasoner, and a moment’s reflection sufficed to remind him of the impotence of his rage. . . . Shall we extract Mr. Pickwick’s masterly description of that heart-rending scene? His note-book, blotted with the tears of a sympathising humanity, lies open before us. . . .”

There is the real human touch. When we, like Pickwick and Luther, are tempted to hurl the ink-pot at the Devil, in whatever form he may present himself, we are conscious of a diminished dignity as o’erspreading as a maiden’s blush. But we forgive Pickwick his impetuosity. We love him for his humanity and his sense of humour, despite the single blemish of the wheelbarrow incident.

Pickwick rarely falls, and Sam Weller never. The shrewd Cockney is sorely taxed, however. The one man that he can never get “to the wind’ard of” is Job Trotter. His brass-faced hypocrisy, open slyness, and his crocodile tears, triumph over all Sam’s insight and scheming. Sam literally longs to “get his own back,” as the vulgar phrase goes, and is always on the verge of “giving himself away”; but his native dignity never suffers in our sight, and we feel that he is supremely victorious over his old enemy when he meets him in the Fleet Prison and takes him to the bar for a pot of porter out of sheer sympathy for his forlorn and starving condition. The victory is clinched when Pickwick, forgetting the ink-pot, benevolently provides for Alfred Jingle the master, and Job Trotter the man, and ensures them a fresh start in life in Australia, where they both succeed. Pickwick and Sam make a perfect combination. What more appropriate than that buoyant Cockney wit should coalesce with benign and spectacled philosophy? The life-long bond and attachment between these two humourists is a superb thing. They are both

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Dickens's very own; life of his life and blood of his blood: in all the play of parody, of travesty and hilarity, they alone stand in his shoes and express his distinctive humour and his peculiar outlook on it all.

The fascinating Sam seems to have only one peer in the gallery of comic creations. That was surely "Bill Boorker" (Cockney for Mr. William Barker), otherwise "Aggerwaitin Bill." He is an omnibus-cad, but he is an inexpressibly droll person as well; and, although we have none of the racy dialogue, he is always thought of on the humourous side as a Sam Weller in embryo.

Mr. Bung, the broker's man, is another miniature humourist: not only does he feel acutely the hardships of his own calling, but he also sees the pathetic in the victims of the bailiff, and the evil as well as the ludicrous in the law which makes of him an unwilling, a degraded and a misplaced official.

As in the case of Job Trotter, Dickens handles Bung very tenderly, as, in fact, he does all his characters. Wherever they are drawn from, he depicts them in their true relation to the larger evils. Such evils, to the discerning eye, he may be seen always to attack. Dickens never failed to recognise that too often the humbler officials of the law were in the position of the victimised *with* their victims. That was the case with Mr. Buffle, the tax collector, in *Mrs. Lirriper's Legacy*; and one of the most excruciatingly funny situations created by Dickens was when Mr. Buffle called on Major Jemmy Jackman for the "inevitable." Buffle was so neglectful of the amenities of business politeness as to keep his hat on his head, and his pen in his mouth like a horse-bit—a proceeding which provoked the eccentric and irascible Major to such an extent that he repeatedly knocked off the offending hat, and loudly threatened to ride him like a horse if he did not remove the pen from his mouth.

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The house of poor meek Buffles caught fire afterwards, and the Major showed another and a finer side to his character, and nobly rescued both him and his family.

Doctor Marigold is also one of Dickens's happiest and most original creations. He, it will be recalled, was no doctor, but a cheap jack. He dispensed no medicaments; but, like Dickens, he was a healer of men through laughter and sheer good nature. He was a strolling, caravan auctioneer, and he obtained his first name from having been born on the King's highway under the ministrations of an accoucheur who, in kindness, made his parents no charge. Out of gratitude they named the babe "Doctor." The story of his life, which he relates himself, is packed as full of humour as the proverbial egg is of meat. Moreover, it is the ripe, matured humour of Dickens in the mid-sixties—rendered with all *jeu d'esprit*, breezy and exhilarating as the sea air, replete with comic fancy, smart repartee, Cockney facetiousness, waggery, badinage,—all delivered with refreshing briskness. Doctor is one of the most nimble-witted, jocose, and sportive of his vagrant profession—a veritable wag and wit-snapper. His patter to the village or town crowd, while disposing of his wares, bristles with characteristic quips and jests, pleasant gibes and smart quizzing. Yet, with it all, there is revealed a penetrative insight into human nature; and through it run streaks of the pathetic, which pull at your heart-strings. You laugh and you weep, and you marvel that within the compass of one life there should be crowded so much of real, honest struggle with adversity, combined with the brave spirit of stoical good humour. Doctor must needs live, and he knows how to move you out of your sluggish and languid doubts about the possession of useful things. He *makes* you buy. He positively moulds your desires from

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sheer intimacy with the well-springs of human feeling. His very wit is brainy. He is Dickens.

But at the back of his cheeriness and his humour is the grim rock of private troubles, under the shadow of which he communes and extracts his humanities. His fond child dies under the ill-treatment of his vicious wife, who commits suicide, and he is left once more a lone man on the King's highway. The picture of the child's death in his arms, while he is pattering for bids to the crowd for bread, is, indeed, the very summit and perfection of humour and pathos in polished blend.

It will be recalled that Marigold takes into his homely but lonely caravan a waif and castaway—a foster-child, who is deaf and dumb. No sooner is his attachment to this child complete than out of his rugged good-humour he is compelled again to self-sacrifice. He has to part with her, placing her in a home for deaf mutes. Meanwhile, he devotes himself to the preparation of a handsome yellow and brass-fitted caravan, with books and snug curtained bed, for her reception in two years' time. She comes back to him in the fulness and freshness of young womanhood, beaming with dumb gratitude and affection. But, oh! inevitable fate! A lover is in the background, who is also deaf and dumb! One more sacrifice! And again Doctor is alone, with only his native and strenuous humour to lighten his life. But one day a pretty little blue-eyed babbler is pressed stealthily up the steps of his caravan, and calls him grandfather! His dead child is with him again in spirit and reality, and his final fear of over-hanging, inherited affliction is submerged in the pretty lispings of a new love in his life.

Thackeray has himself said that the true function of the humourist is "to awaken your love, your pity, your kindness, your scorn for untruth, pretension, and im-

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“posture, your tenderness for the weak, the poor, the “oppressed, the unhappy.” Dickens can always be seen to accomplish this through his mirth and facetiousness. The simple rugged narrative of *Marigold* is a special witness to the completeness and effectiveness of his method.

It was written in 1865 for the Christmas festival, and although it did not possess, as did most of his Christmas Stories, the prevailing colours of evergreen, of frost, and snow, and ghosts, it is nevertheless invested with all the charm of simple homely delight and humour; with the holly-tints of glinting cheeriness, and the misletoe of pearly good-will, and all the lights and shades of Dickens's tenderest humour and simplest pathos.

Dickens did not satirise the upper classes as did Thackeray. His pasquinades of high life were confined to a few personages like the Veneerings, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Cousin Feenix, Lord Frederick Verisopht, and the Podsnaps. As with *Dombey*, we sigh for the smallest sense of humour which would save them from the fate of inflated and unconscious egoisms. In one very droll way, however, Dickens sets a veritable and “volatile” humourist at the so-called “upper classes” of his time.

That odd dwarf, Miss Mowcher, had the keenest of comic senses, and saw into all their little failings and foibles. Dickens was very fond of making little women like Amy Dorrit, Esther Summerson, and Ruth Pinch the exemplars of the highest virtues, and he accordingly made the talkative and dwarfish dispenser of cosmetics and beauty the liveliest and most incisive of satirists. Steerforth thought her “one of the seven wonders of the world.” And were it not for her large heart, and her delightful quizzical humour, her own private and pathetic sense of disadvantage in a hard world, and her intelligent insight into human nature, we should be

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prone to look upon her as a freak. In reality she is a lovable little woman. It is believed that Dickens originally intended this volatile little person to play an ugly part in the story; but he was deterred by a letter from the lady herself, and he deftly transformed her queer personality into one of his inimitable humourists.

Dickens loved characterisation in the odd, the whimsical, the quaint, the elfin and the curvated. Throughout his stories there are many curious obliquities of character and portraiture. Personages with some twist of body and mind abound. All will remember young Smallweed, the weazen-faced, stunted, young "nut," overlaid with "centuries of owlsh wisdom," who drinks, smokes, makes love and wit in monkeyish precocity—"a weird changeling to whom years are nothing." While he keeps us chuckling we do not fail to see he is the child of meanness, the replica in miniature of Grandfather Smallweed, the grasping, clawing usurer.

A fine piece of patho-humourous portraiture, too, is little Jenny Wren, the lame, dwarfish woman-child, who earns her living as a doll's dressmaker. Her wealth of golden hair, her bright, bird-like eyes, her perky, precocious manners, her snappish humour, her drawn, angular, invalid features, and her "bad child"—a drunken, wastrel father, who was her anxious charge—all this renders her picturesque. Her little world of dolls is quaintly linked up with the "dolls" of fashion in the parks and promenades, and the humour of analogy with high life often peeps out of her queer, knowing sayings and reticences, "as who should moralise, 'Oh, this world—this world!'" The humour and pathos of all her talk, combined with her penetrative dislikes and affections, make her a droll yet lovable and pathetic figure.

Who can doubt that these queer personages are real, so vividly are they presented, so replete with pregnant

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humanity, although it is humanity which is sometimes weirdly warped and aslant? That Dickens well knew their originals in real life is abundantly certain. Without a doubt he was familiar with the conditions of poverty and vice which produced them. The wonder is, that he could portray and present them all in the lighter media of comedy or humour, rather than the repellent tragedy from which they are directly drawn. We may laugh *with* them as humourists, or *at* them if they be comic figures; but while we do so, the delineation always compels us to tenderness or sympathy or respect, and forces us to reflect on the grim background of their origin.

Quilp was the *ne plus ultra* of these queer, crooked and yet irresistibly droll portraitures. His was a strange compound of humour, cunning, and ferocity,—humour of the mordant and devilish kind. He played off his goblin-like pranks and antics on his victims with conscious malice and Mephistophelian enjoyment. His knowledge of men and women was preternatural. The edge of his humour was razor-like. Where we cannot resist the “noisy enormity” of unrestrained laughter we feel that Quilp directs it for us against the right persons: our condign judgment goes with it. Those two comic specimens of the sordid and villainous sort of lawyer, Sampson and Sally Brass, we recognise as quite the correct objects of his scoffs and jibes. We enjoy the terror of the obsequious Sampson in the wharf office, where Quilp drinks boiling spirits, and batters the old ship’s figure-head in a fearful passion of malice. And who does not remember his demoniac glee and tigerish playfulness with the Brasses in the cold dripping shanty of a summer-house? Quilp’s sardonic idea of entertaining to tea culminates in his quaffing a steaming hot glass of spirits to their next merry meeting! This griffin mocks and

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taunts, and plays off his monkey-wit from the top of an empty beer-barrel. His victims suffer untold agonies of cold and apprehension, floating the while their fears in tea and trickling rain-water. And Quilp exults, emitting his mocking humour like an animated gargoyle in a thunderstorm. We may be as grave as a society of beavers, but our lungs must fain crow like Chanticleer at such infernal drollery.

“Nothing is more significant of men’s characters than what they find laughable,” said Goethe. In his innumerable hues and phases of humour we find Charles Dickens’s highest traits. He invariably laughs in the cheery, optimistic, and humane humour of Short, the Punch and Judy showman, and never rails in the pessimistic humour of his mate Codlin. He shows us the humanities of humour everywhere about us, and bids us smile, or hies us to loud-throated laughter at every turn. Amidst the teeming populations of out-of-the-way streets, in unexpected and quaint corners, in wayside hostelry or cottage, in travelling caravan or lowly hut, he finds us phases of life which beam with comfort, cheeriness, good humour, comicality, and mirth. He himself revels in it all, and would fain have us join in the laughter which clears the air and the heart. On the other hand, when darkness, poverty, hardship, affliction, bereavement, overtake, how surely does he likewise narrate for us in all tenderness, grief, and condolence! Through all his delineations there comes to every reflective spirit a self-revelation of complicity in all the frailties, vices, and evils of the common life. That revelation is always a call to social service. Through it we realise that only if we attempt to compass the salvation of society can we secure the salvation of our own souls. The test and criterion of true humour is in its capacity to induce this revelation and incite this resolve.

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Every period has had its imperfections and its foolishnesses, and every period has produced its humourists, who, having passed to the higher altitude of self-consciousness, have impeached the current evils in the satiric, the cynical, or the comic spirit. No one has accomplished this in so humane, so versatile, so penetrative, nor in so popular style of humour as Charles Dickens. In very gratitude we smile and chant with Meredith:—

“Laughter! O thou reviver of sick Earth!
Good for the spirit, good
For body, thou! to both art wine and bread.”

CHAPTER III.

THE ACTORS.

“ We had a first-tragedy man in our company once, who when he played Othello, used to black himself all over. But that’s feeling a part and going into it as if you meant it; it isn’t usual—more’s the pity.”

Nicholas Nickleby. Chap. 48.

LIKE Charles Lamb and Walter Scott the very earliest associations of Charles Dickens were with the theatre and its votaries. In his childhood he excited alike the envy and the admiration of his playfellows by compiling a crude tragedy called *Misnar*, the Sultan of India, which his boyish fancy had evolved from *Tales of the Genii*. In after years he was wont to recall his first memories of plays and players, and that even his youthful perception had detected the fact “ that the good King Duncan ” in *Macbeth* “ couldn’t rest in his grave, but was constantly coming out of it and calling himself somebody else.” Besides, it was only an accident that prevented Dickens from choosing drama rather than literature for his calling.

In those early days, when he was struggling to live as a shorthand writer for the proctors at Doctors’ Commons and before he had become a reporter, he conceived the idea of going to theatres every night and of studying conscientiously and practising carefully in various characters and parts. Then he offered himself to Bartley, of Covent Garden, as an actor, prepared to play anything of Mathews’s which might be assigned to him. He was commissioned to appear before Bartley and Charles Kemble, but indisposition intervened, and his subsequent career on the Press resulted in his never

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resuming the project. Years afterwards, of course when he knew both Bartley and Kemble well, he would speculate as to whether they suspected in his person the youth who had applied "to do anything in Mathews's parts." "I had an odd fancy," he says in one letter, "when I was reading the unfortunate little farce . . . that Bartley looked as if some struggling recollection and connection were stirring up within him; but it may only have been his doubts of that humourous composition."

In a charming piece of autobiographical candour he confessed to Forster, in 1845, his serious belief that he would "certainly have been as successful on the boards as I have been between them." Clearly some of his not inconsiderable successes were won, when, on behalf of some good cause or another, he did appear before the footlights in the dramas and comedies of his friends, or in one of the many of his own creation. The same infinite care that he would bestow upon the unfolding of a personality in his novels, he would apply to the representation of a character in, and the production of, a play. He was wont to astonish his friends by the versatility, extent, and accuracy of his knowledge of things "behind the scenes." He was stage-director, very often stage-carpenter, scene-arranger, propertyman, prompter, and bandmaster, and we are told that without offending anyone he kept everyone in order. He adjusted scenes, assisted carpenters, invented costumes, devised play-bills, wrote out calls, and enforced as well as exhibited in his own person everything of which he urged the necessity upon others. The list of plays in which Dickens himself performed is much too lengthy for recital here; but it may be recorded that in one provincial tour he appeared in nine performances and contrived to net no less than £2,551 on behalf of Poole and Leigh Hunt, into which he had thrown himself with irrepressible vivacity and re-

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sourcefulness. It is said of him that throughout "he was the leading figure. In the enjoyment as in the labour he was first. His animal spirits, unresting and supreme, were the attraction of rehearsal at morning, and of the stage at night." When he was not indulging in public performances he would be organising private theatricals for children as well as adults, for which purpose he delighted in throwing open his house, as, say, "Tavistock House Theatre," which said theatre had secured for "its lessee and manager Mr. Crummles."

In the year that saw the establishment of *Household Words* Dickens resumed what Forster picturesquely terms his "splendid strolling" on behalf of a scheme for establishing a Guild of Literature and Art. Amongst the numerous and exciting performances given in connection with this project was one at which Queen Victoria and Prince Albert were present. Unhappily, the Guild was a failure by reason of the fact that it never received the support of the profession it was designed to help. Throughout his life, however, he strove unceasingly to change the status of the men who pursued the two arts of literature and the drama, and the "Life" is so crowded with his activities on behalf or in connection with the latter that it is unnecessary to detail them. Suffice it to say that Dickens felt for the stage an enthusiasm not even excelled by his own nobler calling. Through the one he continuously sought to benefit the other. Touching life at more points than any other writer since Shakespeare, he felt an instinctive thrill at the craft which, above all others, expresses that life, in all its endless varieties of light and shade, tragedy and farce. The stage it is clear, partook to Dickens, of something of his own marvellous, his prodigal power of creation, which threw upon the magic screen of his

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imagination types so arresting and diverse as to demand, not one, but a legion of interpreters.

Dickens acquired an intimacy with the stage that no other writer has commanded since the actors of the Globe Theatre were prompted in their lines by the greatest Englishman who ever lived. He knew the actor well; he knew him in all the vicissitudes of his precarious career; he knew him in his temptations, in his triumphs, and in his bitter failures as well.

“The poor actors,” he wrote, “waylay me in Bow Street to represent their necessities, and I often see one cut down a court when he beholds me coming, cut round Drury Lane to face me, and come up to me near this door in the freshest and most accidental way as if I was the last person he expected to see on the surface of this globe. The other day there appeared before me (simultaneously with a smell of rum in the air) one aged and greasy man with a pair of pumps under his arm. He said he thought if he could get down to somewhere (I think it was Newcastle) he would get ‘taken on’ as Pantaloon, the existing Pantaloon being ‘a stick, sir—a mere muff.’ I observed that I was sorry times were so bad with him. ‘Mr. Dickens, you know our profession, sir—no one knows it better, sir—there is no right feeling in it. I was Harlequin on your circuit, sir, for five-and-thirty years, and was displaced by a boy, sir!—a boy!’” The description in that letter is redolent of Mr. Folair.

Dickens pierced through the glamour of the stage with relentless vision—all the kinder because it saw the real splendour that lurked beneath the tinsel. The squalor of the profession, its crude and glaring faults, its vain boasting, and its intolerable pretensions: all these he knew and depicted with matchless force and clearness. But he preserved, too, that strange buoyancy, that irresistible *élan*, that infectious gaiety and courage, that

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unconquerable and superb *abandon* that marks out the actor from among all the sons of men, and that enabled the historian to lay the whole world under tribute while still a rogue and a vagabond, playing in barns, and sleeping beneath hedges. Those are qualities that will never leave the actor, and though he has exchanged the Savoy Hotel for the rough shelter of the barns, and the Strand and its restaurants for the discomforts of the countryside, still he may be seen and heard in that thoroughfare much the same as of yore—noisy, self-assertive, boastful—and, despite all the rebuffs and caprices of fortune, indomitable and uncrushed! Here we have the very qualities that have carried our race through its darkest hours, that have founded great colonies in the lone places of the earth, and led hopeless causes on to victory. Reading Dickens, one is compelled to feel that the actor is quintessentially an Englishman, drawing upon a magic well of character and reserve that takes small account of temporal odds or material possessions. And one feels something else also: feels it as no writer other than Dickens has power to make one—the humanity of the player: the fact that he, like the audience who watch him, is a man, not a puppet; a man made in the image of God and heir to the same heritage of sorrow and of hate, of love and of tears, of laughter and of joy, that belong, of right, to the sons of Adam.

“ Ah, think then, sweet people,
When you look at us, clad in our motley and tinsel,
Ours are human hearts, beating with passion.”

Take that wonderful, that awesome description, of the clown—a weaker brother of the profession, who, broken on the wheel of its vicissitudes, lies dying in wretchedness, dying of drink and premature decay. It is the friend of his affliction, who sits by his dreadful bedside, who tells the story thus:—

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“It is a touching thing to hear the mind reverting to the ordinary occupations and pursuits of health, when the body lies before you weak and helpless; but when those occupations are of a character the most strongly opposed to anything we associate with grave or solemn ideas, the impression produced is infinitely more powerful. The theatre and the public-house were the chief themes of the wretched man’s wanderings. It was evening, he fancied; he had a part to play that night; it was late, and he must leave home instantly. Why did they hold him and prevent his going? He should lose the money. He must go. No! they would not let him. He hid his face in his burning hands and feebly bemoaned his own weakness and the cruelty of his persecutors. A short pause, and he shouted out a few doggerel rhymes—the last he had ever learnt. He rose in bed, drew up his withered limbs, and rolled about in uncouth positions. He was acting; he was at the theatre. A minute’s silence, and he murmured the burden of some roaring song. He had reached the old house at last: how hot the room was! He had been ill, very ill, but he was well now, and happy. Fill up his glass. Who was that that dashed it from his lips? It was the same persecutor that had followed him before. He fell back upon his pillow and moaned aloud. A short period of oblivion, and he was wandering through a tedious maze of low-arched rooms—so low, sometimes, that he must creep upon his hands and knees to make his way along; it was close and dark, and every way he turned some obstacle impeded his progress. There were insects, too, hideous crawling things with eyes that stared upon him and filled the very air around: glistening horribly amidst the thick darkness of the place. The

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walls and ceiling were alive with reptiles—the vault expanded to an enormous size—frightful figures flitted to and fro—and the faces of men he knew, rendered hideous by gibing and mouthing, peered out from among them; they were searing him with heated irons and binding his head with cords till the blood started, and he struggled madly for life.

“At the close of one of these paroxysms, when I had with great difficulty held him down in his bed, he sank into what appeared to be a slumber. Overpowered with watching and exertions, I had closed my eyes for a few minutes, when I felt a violent clutch on my shoulder. I awoke instantly. He had raised himself up so as to seat himself in bed—a dreadful change had come over his face, but consciousness had returned, for he evidently knew me. The child, who had been long since disturbed by his ravings, rose from its little bed and ran towards its father, screaming with fright; the mother hastily caught it in her arms lest he should injure it in the violence of his insanity; but, terrified by the alteration of his features, stood transfixed by the bedside. He grasped my shoulder convulsively, and, striking his breast with the other hand, made a desperate attempt to articulate. It was unavailing; he extended his arm towards them and made another violent effort. There was a rattling noise in the throat—a glare of the eye—a short, stifled groan—and he fell back—dead!”

Has anything at once so direct, so simple, and yet so tragically ghastly, ever been penned? This description of a man who has lived by moving others to wild laughter and boisterous mirth, while his own heart has been turning to gall and wormwood is, in its way, without a parallel in the whole realm of English literature.

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But of all the successful creations that Dickens ever attempted, undoubtedly the most supreme example of the actor is that of the "Colossal Crummles." He is a success, of course, first and foremost because he lives: we watch him from the first moment of his entry into *Nicholas Nickleby*, until that last inimitable farewell that he takes of his "lion-hearted boy." He is worth a dozen Ralph Nicklebys, or a score of Newman Noggs, for he is vibrant with life—so vibrant that you hear the roll of his portentous voice and watch his portly presence as he stands drinking his brandy and water, receiving Nicholas "with an inclination of the head, something between the courtesy of a Roman emperor and the nod of a pot companion." Crummles is a typical actor because, above all, he possesses the quality of his tribe to a pre-eminent degree, so that one first scorns, then pities, and finally envies that matchless optimism, that astounding and exaggerated power of make-believe which is at once the strength and weakness of the man, as it is of the profession generally.

"'Been in front to-night?' said Mr. Crummles.

'No,' replied Nicholas, 'not yet. I am going to see the play.'

'We've had a pretty good let,' said Mr. Crummles. 'Four front places in the centre and the whole of the stage-box.'

'Oh, indeed!' said Nicholas; 'a family, I suppose?'

'Yes,' replied Mr. Crummles, 'yes. It's an affecting thing. There are six children, and they never come unless the phenomenon plays.'

It would have been difficult for any party, family or otherwise, to have visited the theatre on a night when the phenomenon did *not* play, inasmuch as she always sustained one, and not uncommonly two or

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three, characters, every night; but Nicholas, sympathising with the feelings of a father, refrained from hinting at this trifling circumstance, and Mr. Crummles continued to talk, uninterrupted by him.

‘Six,’ said the gentleman; ‘pa and ma eight, aunt nine, governess ten, grandfather and grandmother twelve. Then there’s the footman who stands outside with a bag of oranges and a jug of toast-and-water, and sees the play for nothing through the little pane of glass in the box-door—it’s cheap at a guinea; they gain by taking a box.’

‘I wonder you allow so many,’ observed Nicholas.

‘There’s no help for it,’ replied Mr. Crummles; ‘it’s always expected in the country. If there are six children six people come to hold them in their laps. A family box carries double always. Ring in the orchestra, Grudden!’

That useful lady did as she was requested, and shortly afterwards the tuning of three fiddles was heard. Which process having been protracted as long as it was supposed that the patience of the audience could possibly bear it, was put a stop to by another jerk of the bell, which, being the signal to begin in earnest, set the orchestra playing a variety of popular airs, with involuntary variations.”

There is something infectious, something inspiring in the courage of the man who regards “four front places in the centre and the whole of the stage-box” as a “pretty good let.” No doubt it is a “bluff”; but in the sense that bluff is pretence, an actor may be said to be good or bad precisely as he succeeds in that accomplishment. To pretend that things are better than they are—even ridiculously better—that the members of one’s family and

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company, instead of being poor, second rate, jaded failures, are budding geniuses destined to go forth conquering and to conquer; that, after all, boastful and pretentious though it be, is at least manly and forgivable. The unpardonable sin would surely have been for Crummles to have had a genius in his company and to have ignored him and to have been blind to the talents the various members did possess: it *was* pardonable to describe his company as geniuses, for in the strange world of the stage the public might at any moment have endorsed the verdict in some one particular case. The difference in outlook is really fundamental: it is between the pessimist and the optimist, and in some mystical manner, though the pessimist is nearly always exact, it is his opponent who is sometimes right and whose victories are worth recording. After all, it was a pessimist who pointed out of a certain man that he was but the son of a carpenter, and the objection was true, but history has endorsed the answer that that man was a prophet, and the son of a prophet!

But let us hear Mr. Crummles on his family:—

‘“I am in the theatrical profession myself, my wife is in the theatrical profession, my children are in the theatrical profession. I had a dog that lived and died in it from a puppy, and my chaise-pony goes on in *Timour the Tartar*. I’ll bring you out and your friend, too. Say the word. I want a novelty.’

‘I don’t know anything about it,’ rejoined Nicholas, whose breath had been almost taken away by this sudden proposal. ‘I never acted a part in my life, except at school.’

‘There’s genteel comedy in your walk and manner, juvenile tragedy in your eye, and touch-and-go farce in your laugh,’ said Mr. Vincent

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Crummles. 'You'll do as well as if you had thought of nothing else but the lamps from your birth downwards.'

Nicholas thought of the small amount of small change that would remain in his pocket after paying the tavern bill; and he hesitated.

'You can be useful to us in a hundred ways,' said Mr. Crummles. 'Think what capital bills a man of your education could write for the shop windows.'

'Well, I think I could manage that department,' said Nicholas.

'To be sure you could,' replied Mr. Crummles. 'For further particulars see small hand-bills—we might have half a volume in every one of 'em. Pieces, too; why, you could write up a piece to bring out the whole strength of the company whenever we wanted one.'

'I am not quite so confident about that,' replied Nicholas. 'But I daresay I could scribble something now and then that would suit you.'

'We'll have a new show-piece out directly,' said the manager. 'Let me see—peculiar resources of this establishment—new and splendid scenery—you must manage to introduce a real pump and two washing-tubs.'

'Into the piece?' said Nicholas.

'Yes,' replied the manager. 'I bought 'em cheap at a sale the other day, and they'll come in admirably. That's the London plan. They look up some dresses and properties and have a piece written to fit 'em. Most of the theatres keep an author on purpose.'

'Indeed!' cried Nicholas.

'Oh, yes,' said the manager; 'a common thing. It'll look very well in the bills in separate lines—'

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Real Pump!—Splendid Tubs!—Great Attraction! You don't happen to be anything of an artist, do you?'

'That is not one of my accomplishments,' rejoined Nicholas.

'Ah! Then it can't be helped,' said the manager. 'If you had been, we might have had a large wood-cut of the last scene for the posters, showing the whole depth of the stage, with the pump and tubs in the middle; but, however, if you're not, it can't be helped.'

'What should I get for all this?' inquired Nicholas, after a few moments' reflection. 'Could I live by it?'

'Live by it!' said the manager. 'Like a prince! With your own salary, and your friends, and your writings, you'd make—ah! you'd make a pound a week!'

'You don't say so!'

'I do, indeed, and if we had a run of good houses, nearly double the money.'''

Nicholas accepts the commission, and here is the motley company in which he finds himself:—

"The ladies were gathered in a little knot by themselves round the rickety table before-mentioned. There was Miss Snellicci, who could do anything from a medley dance to Lady Macbeth, and also always played some part in blue silk knee-smalls at her benefit—glancing, from the depths of her coal-skuttle straw bonnet, at Nicholas, and affecting to be absorbed in the recital of a diverting story to her friend, Miss Ledbrook, who had brought her work, and was making up a ruff in the most natural manner possible. There was Miss Belvawney, who seldom aspired to speaking parts and

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usually went on as a page in white silk hose, to stand with one leg bent, and contemplate the audience, or to go in and out after Mr. Crummles in stately tragedy—twisting up the ringlets of the beautiful Miss Bravassa, who had once had her likeness taken “in character” by an engraver’s apprentice, whereof impressions were hung up for sale in the pastrycook’s window, and the greengrocer’s, and at the circulating library, and the box-office, whenever the announce bills came out for her annual night. There was Mrs. Lenville, in a very limp bonnet and veil, decidedly in that way in which she would wish to be if she truly loved Mr. Lenville; there was Miss Gazingi, with an imitation ermine boa tied in a loose knot round her neck, flogging Mr. Crummles, junior, with both ends, in fun. Lastly, there was Mrs. Grudden in a brown cloth pelisse and a beaver bonnet, who assisted Mrs. Crummles in her domestic affairs and took money at the doors, and dressed the ladies, and swept the house, and held the prompt-book when everybody else was on for the last scene, and acted any kind of part on any emergency without ever learning it, and was put down in the bills under any name or names whatever, that occurred to Mr. Crummles as looking well in print.”

Crummles, the old-type manager of the old-time fit-up company, with his performing pony and his infant phenomenon, his African knife swallower, his impossible plays, and his still more impossible audacity, has long gone into the *ewigkeit*; but, after all, the man’s equipment, his apparatus, and his limitations—these were but the accidental settings of his temperament. The really characteristic elements, the essentials of his soul, remain. They are part and parcel of the profession. You may see them any day personified in Maiden Lane; you

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may find a dozen Crummles all talking together about each other or of themselves, at agents, all with the same exaggerated emphasis, the same invincible confidence. Similarly, in the vicinity of Bedford Street on almost any day of the week, you shall meet "a heavy lead" not unlike Jem Hutley, who, you will remember, related "The Stroller's Tale" (*Pickwick*), in which he himself appeared. And it is more than likely you will meet in the Bodega Bar some follower of the profession equally as audacious and equally as impecunious as Alfred Jingle. Certain it is that some poor soul possessing no more attractive patronymic than did Mr. Jem Larkins (*Sketches by Boz*), will, like him, be known to the public with nothing less dignified than Horatio St. Julian, or some modern interpreter of Macbeth who also, like Mr. Loggins, may still hear plaudits to himself under the stage-name of Mr. Beverley.

Another example of the ludicrous among the profession is found in Mr. Wopsle in *Great Expectations*. Mr. Wopsle, it will be remembered, was a friend of Mrs. Joe Gargery's, was at first a parish clerk and afterwards strutted the London stage under the vaulting title of Mr. Waldengarver. His success, however, as an actor was not particularly brilliant, and the scene when Pip and Herbert witnessed his impersonation of Hamlet may be recalled:—

"Whenever the undecided Prince had to ask a question or state a doubt, the public helped him out with it. As, for example, on the question whether 'twas nobler in mind to suffer, some roared yes and some no, and some, inclining to both opinions, said 'toss up for it'"

What a superb piece of satire it all is! And that brings us to a point which is of crucial importance, not only as regards Dickens, but as regards the calling of

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the actor and the true view we should take of it. Reference has been made to the scene when Nicholas leaves Crummles's company, and when the manager takes a theatrical farewell of his *protégé*. It so exactly illustrates the point that it may very appropriately be reproduced in full:—

“As they hurried up to the coach, which was now in the open street and all ready for starting, Nicholas was not a little astonished to find himself suddenly clutched in a close and violent embrace, which nearly took him off his legs; nor was his amazement at all lessened by hearing the voice of Mr. Crummles exclaim, ‘It is he—my friend, my friend!’

‘Bless my heart,’ cried Nicholas, struggling in the manager’s arms, ‘what are you about?’

The manager made no reply, but strained him to his breast again, exclaiming as he did so, ‘Farewell, my noble, my lion-hearted boy!’

In fact, Mr. Crummles, who could never lose any opportunity for professional display, had turned out for the express purpose of taking a public farewell of Nicholas, and to render it the more imposing, he was now, to that young gentleman’s most profound annoyance, inflicting upon him a rapid succession of stage embraces, which, as everybody knows, are performed by the embracer’s laying his or her chin on the shoulder of the object of affection, and looking over it. This Mr. Crummles did in the highest style of melodrama, pouring forth at the same time all the most dismal forms of farewell he could think of, out of the stock pieces. Nor was this all, for the elder Master Crummles was going through a similar ceremony with Smike; while Master Percy Crummles, with a very little second-

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hand camlet cloak, worn theatrically over his left shoulder, stood by, in the attitude of an attendant officer, waiting to convey the two victims to the scaffold.

The lookers on laughed very heartily, and as it was as well to put a good face upon the matter, Nicholas laughed too when he had succeeded in disengaging himself, and rescuing the astonished SMIKE, climbed up to the coach roof after him and kissed his hand in honour of the absent Mrs. Crummies as they rolled away."

Now the point is, that all this display on the part of Mr. Vincent Crummies was quite unnecessary; it was the ebullition of a man who loved acting for acting's sake, and that gives us the clue to the psychology of the actor and to the reason why Dickens was so successful in his analysis of their characters. If we are to be quite candid with ourselves, then every man is an actor, and make-believe is an essential of the life of the normal man. The man who is so self-centred that he never loses his identity and becomes in fancy another person: we know too well his fate. At the best, we have him depicted in Scrooge, in Grandfather Smallweed, or, to take a nobler example, in Sir Leicester Dedlock: and at the worst, he dies in a madhouse cell, being by that time firmly persuaded that he is a royal person, or that he owns the British Museum, or that the Prime Minister has robbed him of his patrimony. The annals of psychology are replete with such cases as these—cases of men who have become mad because they could not escape from themselves, until at last they found that escape in madness. It is written that "Whosoever would save his soul must lose it," or at least risk its loss; and with equal truth it may be postulated that he who would preserve his identity must needs let fancy lead him to take on another's

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every now and then, or assuredly the thing that he prizes most will leave him for ever.

It was the recognition of this fact that made Dickens the most delightful exponent of actors in our literature—and not the professional actor only: he gave us charming little sketches of men whose souls were kept fresh and young and strong by the histrionic capacity that they somehow cherished. You remember how Mr. Richard Swiveller, feeling a-thirst, called to himself for a glass of wine haughtily, handed it to himself humbly, snatched it from himself fiercely, and having drunk it, returned the glass to himself cavalierly. Now Richard acted thus because he was a born actor; and who will deny that he was one of the most delightful of the Bohemians that throng the pages of the master? Then, again, poor Wemmick; was he not acting when he passed through the drawbridge of the castle in Walworth, or let off the toy cannon? What would one have given to have known him? And what would one have forfeited to have escaped the acquaintance, say, of Dombey, that cold, frigid automaton, who could never forget himself. Then, again, that “very gentlemanly man, celebrated almost everywhere for his deportment,” Mr. Turveydrop. He possessed, it will be recalled “a false complexion, false teeth, false whiskers, and a wig; he had a fur collar and a padded breast to his coat; he was pinched in and swelled out; he poised himself on one leg in a high-shouldered, round-elbowed state of elegance not to be surpassed. He had a cane, he had an eye-glass, he had a snuff-box, he had rings, he had wristbands, he had everything but a touch of nature; he was not like youth, he was not like age, he was not like anything in the world but a model of deportment.” He married a meek little dancing mistress, from whom he extorted the wherewithal to exhibit himself and generally to lead an idle

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life in the very best clothes; he could only tolerate existence by his daily round of attitudinising and acting.

After all, if we go back from Dickens to the life that he interprets, do we not find that the rule holds good? The man who is only himself is a bore, and is fit company for nobody. Pascal, it will be remembered, once said, "*L'homme qui n'aime que soi ne hait rien tant que d'être seul avec soi.*" On the other hand, the man who can be anybody is company for everyone. "For to possess in loneliness the joy of all earth" means, and must mean, that the soul is touched with that indefinable capacity for acting, without which life would be as dreary and unreal, as colourless and empty as a company of funeral mutes mourning in silence the death of one they never knew, and partaking of his own condition.

It is not that man ought not to, but rather that he *cannot*, live unto himself alone. To do so is to let paralysis creep over the soul and to court death. It may be that Dickens exaggerated this truth; but then, as Mr. G. K. Chesterton remarked, "Truth is the only thing you can exaggerate: it is the only thing that will stand it." And we shall find that of all the creations of Dickens, be they saints or sinners, rogues or honest men, it is the actors that we revere and love. Micawber was an execrable man of business, but he was a master of make-believe; and who does not prefer him to the amiable and precise Traddles? Toots was inane, but his letters and apostrophies were gorgeous literary feasts, and make one feel more than willing to give a whole week of Walter Gay for one evening of his rival! Quilp, even, has the strange arresting charm of a man who is always acting even in his villainy. It would be easy to add to the list, but we will close with one supreme example—Simon Tappertit. Is he not at once one of the most ridiculous, but, at the same time, one of the most delight-

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ful of men that ever moved us to laughter and to tears? And yet how true, and how lifelike he is! Perhaps he is one of the few, very few characters that Dickens is unjust to, and maybe even a little cruel. Yet, with it all, who does not know and love him?

It is of real importance that we should grasp all that Dickens has to teach as to the worth and the *prestige* of the actor's craft: that we should learn from him, from his great, his rare common-sense and wise humanism, all that the world owes to the histrion. For side by side with much extravagant, and, indeed, inane adulation that has degenerated into a kind of mummer-worship—a fetish that was bound to excite a strong reaction—we have lately witnessed a counter-criticism upon the stage directed by a man of culture and scholarship, and, therefore, likely to influence the opinions of those who really count in these matters. Mr. Birrell's attack upon the actor is one of the most powerful, as it is one of the most courageous controversial efforts of our time. The fact that it has gone largely unanswered does not mean that it has gone unnoticed, for what the author of *Obiter Dicta* said openly, a great many people are thinking covertly. Mr. Birrell's position is best illustrated by a story that he recites from Boswell's Johnson:—

“Boswellians will remember,” he says, “the name of Tom Davies as one of frequent occurrence in the great biography. Tom was an actor of some repute, and (so it was said) read *Paradise Lost* better than any man in England. One evening, when Johnson was lounging behind the scenes at Drury (it was, I hope, before his pious resolution to go there no more), Davies made his appearance on his way to the stage in all the majesty and millinery of his part. The situation is picturesque. The great and dingy Reality of the eighteenth century,

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the Immortal, and the bedizened little player. 'Well, Tom,' said the great man (and this is the whole story), 'well, Tom, and what art thou to-night?' 'What art thou to-night?' It may sound rather like a tract, but it will, I think, be found difficult to find an answer to the question consistent with any true view of human dignity.' And he goes on to say that, "Our last argument derived from the nature of the case is, that deliberately to set yourself as the occupation of your life to amuse the adult and to astonish, or even to terrify, the infant population of your native land, is to degrade yourself."

One may be pardoned for taking the last argument first, because it contains the most apposite comment on the story as well as its own refutation. If to amuse the public and to astonish the infant population be really degrading, then, indeed, has Dickens written in vain, and it is an open question whether Shakespeare has not done so likewise. What was *Pickwick* but an attempt to amuse the adult population? What else was *As You Like It*? While, as for the other clause of the indictment, may we not say that the man who disdains to astonish children must know very little of his Dickens? Quilp's boy, and the Artful Dodger, and little David Copperfield marching on Dover, and Pip with the convict on the marshes—all these must have passed him by, for had he known them he would have loved them, and would have forborne to turn with supercilious look at the infant population. Of course, it may be argued that it is only the lighter side of the actor's craft that is here pilloried, and that the work of Shakespeare and Dickens was marked by other qualities than rollicking farce and empty persiflage. The simple answer to that is, that the actor possesses those qualities also, as Johnson learnt, if not from Davies, then from his friend Garrick—the

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qualities that can impress upon the soul a sense of the mystery and the pathos, aye, and the awfulness of life. While as for the jibe disguised as a question, "Who are you to-night?" that surely might have been as reasonably addressed to the author as to the actor: to the creator of Hamlet, as to the man who played it: to the genius who conceived Sidney Carton as to the actor who popularised the conception! We may depend upon it that the man who creates a character suffers with it, acts it, lives with it, is, in very fact, that character. Did not Dickens suffer cruelly the night when little Paul was dying. Did he not suffer then something akin to the agonies of death itself? Was he not, at another time, laughing with Swiveller, rejoicing with Guppy, sorrowing with Little Nell? And the same taunt could as surely be addressed to Dickens as to the poor actor, "What art thou to-night?"

The fact is, Mr. Birrell speaks too much in this matter under the influence of that drab Puritanism, which, to be logical, must dethrone literature as well as the stage; that Puritanism of which Gradgrind is the supreme example. Curiously, that same person was the only one man in the whole of fiction who was never anybody but himself on any given night of any given year; he, the apostle of hard fact; who never acted, and who never let his children act; who was always himself free from fancy, and who always kept his children free also, and whose daughter lived to cry out to him thus: "How could you give me life and take from me all the inappreciable things that raise it from a state of conscious death? Where are the graces of my soul? Where are the sentiments of my heart? What have you done, oh, father, with the garden that should have bloomed once in this great Wilderness here?"

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The daughter is saved, but the son is helped on by the iron *régime* of fact to dishonour and disaster; and, when at the end, Gradgrind, the rich manufacturer, the great apostle of unrelenting realism and respectability, seeks to save his boy, it is Sleary, with his muddled head and generous soul—Sleary, the poor vagabond stroller, the rough man who has the wickedness to play in his travelling circus to children—who from pure goodness of heart comes to the rescue and enables the scapegoat to escape. Do you remember his rebuke to Gradgrind? It stands for all time as the greatest charter of the profession which Dickens delighted to honour:—

“ Thquire, thake handth, firtht and latht! Don’t be cross with uth poor vagabondth. People mutht be amuthed. They can’t be alwayth a learning, nor yet they can’t be always a working, they an’t made for it. You *mutht* have uth, Thquire. Do the withe thing and the kind thing, too, and make the betht of uth, not the wurtht! ”

CHAPTER IV.

THE QUEER TRADESMEN.

“As it would have been hard to count the dozens upon dozens of grotesque figures that were ever ready to commit all sorts of absurdities on the turning of a handle, so it would have been no easy task to mention any human folly, vice, or weakness that had not its type, immediate or remote, in Caleb Plummer’s room. And not in an exaggerated form, for very little handles will move men and women to as strange performances as any toy was ever made to undertake.”

The Cricket on the Hearth. Chapter II.

ONE of the greatest of Victorian critics declared that Charles Dickens by the very conception of some of his characters had proved himself “a god among the creators of deathless men.” Few of us who care to gaze upon the giant peaks in his mountainous range of human portraiture will be disposed to quarrel with this majestic praise. Great men stalked his stage; great in the sovereign virtue of simple affection; capable of perfect, because prosaic, heroism; fearless in trouble and untroubled in faith. He created great villains, too; men with the fierceness of hate, the frenzy of theft, the very lust of death itself. They also became the supreme witnesses of his matchless genius. He gave the world women and children whose names, for their purity of soul and selfless devotion, will be lisped on the lips of immortality. But in nothing was the transcendent excellence of his work more fittingly revealed than in his capacity to seize and to re-picture all that was whimsical, *bizarre*, odd—call it what you will—in the life and times in which he moved.

On the sensitive retina of his brain was photographed all that was eccentric in human appearance, demeanour,

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deportment—in manner, speech or thought. Dickens followed and observed all these things with the keenest zest. Later he would reproduce them or combine the types in satiric portraiture and ironic contrast, until he had the shattering laughter of the world for his applause.

His huge canvases are crowded with types of the grotesque. They elbow themselves jostlingly into our memory in all degrees and grades of whimsicality. See them stream in, with Silas Wegg, the street vendor; Sam Weller, the shrewd and undying jester of Cockneydom; Winkle and Snodgrass and Tupman, the purely farcical; young Smallweed and Quilp, the elfin and impish; Miss Flite and Mr. Dick, the half-demented, and Barnaby Rudge, the imbecile! These are but the banner-bearers in this amazing army of immortal grotesques.

“Caricatures,” ejaculates the critic scornfully. Of course they are caricatures; but then caricature is the hall-mark of perpetual truth. Gladstone’s collar was the subject of daily caricature; the height of it and its grotesqueness, like his nose, were undeniable facts. Dickens’s exaggeration of some one side of a complex and baffling character gave verisimilitude to the whole. But his fine sense of sincerity of motive, alike in art and moral purpose, rarely permitted him to descend to merely fantastic travesty. He never caricatured the Soul. Search where you may it is impossible to find any purely stricken and inferior phase of humour. On the contrary there is always some element of satire, some air of pathos or atmosphere of symbolism which blends so perfectly that indignity is lost, seeming vulgarity is redeemed, and the apparently riotous farce softens itself to the true humour of a great and ennobling humanist appeal. All laughter is transiently good for the world; only that abides which provokes and ends in thoughtful contemplation.

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Let us test how far this is true. From our group of Dickens's queer tradesmen or traders we select one in particular for description and analysis. He is Mr. Krook, of *Bleak House*, the quaint proprietor of that emporium of heterogeneity commonly known as the Marine Store. Located in the purlieus of the Law round old Lincoln's Inn Fields, his shop has become the repository of waste paper, old iron and kitchen stuff, ladies' and gents' wardrobes, ladies' hair, rags, dirty bottles of huge variety. "Nothing seems to be sold, everything seems to be bought." Here are to be seen the gross waste and slag of civilisation, the gleanings of the ash-heap, the encrusted refuse of domestic and business *mélange*, and the mellow and mouldy remnants of dog's-eared papers, parchments, scrolls, books, ledgers and other scraps of the Law. It is the very Valley of the Shadow of the Law and of the Law's Dead Hand!

It had "the air of being in a legal neighbourhood, and of being, as it were, a dirty hanger-on and dis-owned relation of the Law."

Enter the queer proprietor out of the dim obscurity of this modern inferno of grimy muddle and bewildering litter: "As it is still foggy and dark, and as the shop was blinded besides by the wall of Lincoln's Inn, intercepting the light within a couple of yards, we should have not seen so much but for a lighted lantern that an old man in spectacles and a hairy cap was carrying about in the shop. Turning towards the door he now caught sight of us. He was short, cadaverous, and withered; *with* his head sunk sideways between his shoulders, and the breath issuing in visible smoke from his mouth as if he were on fire within. His throat, chin and eyebrows were so frosted with white hairs, and so gnarled with veins and puckered skin, that he

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“looked from his breast upward like some old root in
“a fall of snow.”

“‘Hi, hi,’ said the old man coming to the door, ‘have
“you anything to sell?’ A large grey cat leaped
“from some neighbouring shelf on his shoulders and
“startled us all.”

Like the opening witch-scene of “Macbeth,” that
squalid shop strikes at once the key-note of the story.
Here too

“Fair is foul, and foul is fair.”

For on Mr. Krook’s crowded, fœtid, and stifling house,
as on its foggy, musty environs, there have fallen the
ghastly shadows of the Law’s delays—ghastly because
they take human shape. Mr. Krook himself is involved
in the entanglements of that pitiless machine, the Court
of Chancery. Listen as he recites the story of the suicide
of Tom Jarndyce. Look, too, upon that pathetic, half-
witted, grotesque Miss Flite. In the very Wards in
Chancery, Richard Carstone and Esther Summerson, we
already observe symptoms of the besetting influence of
these purlieus. And as for the shrunken denizen of this
pitiable shop, with his perching snarling grimalkin, Lady
Jane, in him as in the others we see that

“ Nature is subdued
To what it works in, like the dyer’s hand.”

Esther listens with horror to Krook’s recital, and has
the fearful prognosis of coming evil in “an inheritance
of protracted misery.”

“Ada’s colour has entirely left her, and Richard was
scarcely less pale,” as Mr. Krook gave ominous clues and
portents of the Shadow of Chancery Law in relation to
the *casus belli*, to wit: “Jarndyce and Jarndyce.”

“‘My landlord Krook,’ said the little old lady,
“‘he is called among the neighbours the Lord Chan-

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“ ‘cellor. His shop is called the Court of Chancery. He
“ ‘is a very eccentric person. He is very odd. Oh, I
“ ‘assure you, he is very odd!’ ”

“ ‘You see,’ (said Krook) ‘I have so many things
“ ‘here wasting away and going to rack and ruin,
“ ‘and that’s why they have given me and my place a
“ ‘christening. . . . I don’t mind. I go and see my
“ ‘noble and learned brother pretty well every day when
“ ‘he sits at the Inn. He don’t notice me, but I notice
“ ‘him. We both grub on in a muddle. Hi, Lady
“ ‘Jane! Tom Jarndyce was often in here
“ ‘telling them to keep out of Chancery whatever they
“ ‘did. For, says he, it’s being ground to bits in a slow
“ ‘mill; it’s being roasted at a slow fire; it’s being stung
“ ‘to death by single bees; it’s being drowned by drops;
“ ‘it’s going mad by grains.’”

Here is the deep note of tragedy, but it is not unrelieved. One can not only see, one can feel the shadow of hovering disaster and yet be constantly distracted by flashes of that genius which, unlike Byron, instead of glorifying misanthropy, pierced and stabbed it with a biting wit. Without the humour which is the very essence, without the *quiddity* of Dickens—Krook and his squalid shop and mean environment would be positively repellent. One would feel that this was a type of humour which stands Truth on her head and then makes street-boy grimaces and gestures of derision at her!

But its light tints and tones save the picture. The winsomeness of Esther Summerson alone lights up the gloom. To employ a line from Gray, “What strains of vocal transport round her play.” Miss Flite’s amusing oddities, with her larks, linnets, and goldfinches are certainly no daubs of grey.

Dickens was a convinced modern; the past only interested him so long as it had an imperious message for

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the present. Similarly Mr. Krook and his emporium of bewildering and bedevilled welter were only created by Dickens as a stern reminder of the then legal and social disorder.

Our Mutual Friend, the novelist's last completed work, is another rich mine of "queer traders," like Boffin, the golden dustman; Silas Wegg, who dropped into prophecy and poetry; Mr. Venus, the strange taxidermist; Fascination Fledgby, the dealer in sham Brummagem ware; and Riah, the Jew.

The last-named will be recalled as the venerable, fatherly and benignant person who first befriended Lizzie Hexham, and who, growing tired of posing for Fascination Fledgby as "Pubsey & Co.," and thus dishonouring his race, took up his residence with little Jenny Wren, the doll's dressmaker. In passing, it should be observed that Jenny is a perfectly drawn and original portrait of a diminutive lame girl of unique and vivid traits. Quaint in her almost sprite-like precociousness, witty, womanly and droll, she is a delightful and appealing little personage.

Riah is a pleasing, passive, self-poised, gentle character, who finds the iron entering his soul as he becomes more and more the tool of the infamous Fledgby. In him and through him, Dickens completely turned the tables upon the conventional conception of the Hebrew. The great lover of his kind had no place in his soul for any squalid Anti-Semitism; none of that narrowness of view which condemns a great race of splendid achievement to become the pariahs and the outcasts of civilisation. Dickens desired in his day, as should every cleanminded man to-day, to do the Jews justice. He gave us the pestilential Fagin; but, lest a noble people should be judged by that standard of avarice and

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cunning, he depicts Riah in a light that is magically virtuous and yet irresistible in its homely appeal.

“Fascination Fledgy took another scratch at his intellectual head with his hat [and said] ‘Who
“but you and I ever heard of a poor Jew?’

“‘The Jews,’ said the old man raising his eyes from the ground with his former smile. ‘They
“hear of poor Jews often, and are very good to
“them.’”

The real lustre of the art of Dickens is dazzlingly revealed in this mixing of light and bright characters with those of sombre and sometimes darksome hues, like Gaffer Hexam with his ghastly calling of body-snatching; like Rogue Riderhood, the waterside desperado; and the other habitués of the “Six Jolly Fellowship Porters”—that tavern of “dropsical appearance” by the riverside, looking as though it might take to the water at any time.

What an amazing contrast Dickens gives us in the resourcefulness, the patience, and the almost faultless attributes of Lizzie Hexam and those of her half-savage father. The man is depicted in a rush of volubility like to the deafening thunders of an unleashed storm. See him as he showed himself on the dark bosom of the Thames that night.

“. . . with no covering on his matted head, with
“his brown arms bare to between the elbow and the
“shoulder, with one loose knot of a looser kerchief lying
“low on his bare breast in a wilderness of beard and
“whisker, with such a dress as he wore seeming to be
“made out of the mud which begrimed his boat, still
“there was business-like usage in his steady gaze.”

From this rugged and ugly “tradesman,” who could assume in the intervals of his leisure a penumbra of “higher moralities with his pipe,” we soon pass to the more pleasing presence of Silas Wegg, that wooden-

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legged and amusing humbug. Silas is a remarkably real character of old London life, and is reminiscent of the days when Mayhew scoured the streets for sketches for his "London Labour and London Poor." Silas Wegg, or as he is once styled, "Wooden " Wegg, is, in his inner life, a remarkable contrast to his outer appearance. He is a strangely "bookish" character, one whose bogus literary attainments enable him to pass with facility from the popular halfpenny ballads, which adorn his stall on a clothes-horse, to Gibbon's "*Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*"—yea, even to the eighth volume. Over against a house in Cavendish Square he had established his pitch by "imperceptible prescription," and Dickens hits him off—him and his trade paraphernalia—with the most exquisite facetiousness. So plainly do you see the man, in his hard-featured, wooden pomposity, that your bursts of excruciating laughter might almost make him turn round his stall. "Assuredly this stall was the hardest little stall of all the sterile little stalls in London. It gave you the faceache to look at his apples, the stomachache to look at his oranges, and the toothache to look at his nuts. . . . Wegg was a knotty man, and a close grained, with a face carved out of very hard material, that had just as much play as a watchman's rattle. When he laughed, certain jerks occurred in it, and the rattle "sprung."

Despite the droll presentment of Silas Wegg's introduction, he is a deep and mercenary character and is destined to play a crafty part in the plot of the story. As one "who took a powerful sight of notice of passers-by," he managed to cozen up acquaintance with Mr. Boffin, the Golden Dustman. Boffin is not now in trade, and bears the manner of wealthy, yet simple and uninformed, leisure. Simple and good-natured he is, and utterly unlettered; and the story of how he falls a prey

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to the deep and knotty Wegg has its dramatic as well as its comic side.

Boffin is "a one-sided old fellow in mourning with a comical ambling gait . . . dressed in a pea overcoat and carrying a large stick. . . . Both as to his dress and to himself, he was of an overlapping rhinoceros build, with folds in his cheeks, and in his forehead, and his eyelids, and his lips, and his ears; but with bright, eager, childishly-enquiring grey eyes under his ragged eyebrows and his broad-brimmed hat." The unlettered but well-to-do and retired Dustman discovers a latent desire to try Wegg's literary powers. He has envied him his familiarity with the ballads, and has regarded him as one who has "all print open to him." "Here am I," he says, "a man without a wooden leg, and yet all print is shut to me." He possesses eight ponderous volumes of a work which he understands represents "The-Dcline-And-Fall-Off-The-Rooshan-Empire," and it is more completely closed to him than the Pyramids of Egypt. In his hours of unlearned ease he is stirred with curiosity to penetrate beyond its mysterious portals. And he proposes, with child-like eagerness and considerable deference, an arrangement with the learned "Wooden" Wegg to read it in the evenings for a small monetary consideration. The picture of these two worthies entering into this bargain is so punctuated with bits of *grotesquerie* in manner and speech as constantly to keep a chuckle in the throat—a chuckle which tends to expand into quite uproarious merriment. In this scene Dickens is the personification of the Comic Spirit who, Meredith tells us, hovers overhead, and, looking humanely malign upon our poor frailties and incongruities, casts an oblique light over unconscious humanity, bursting the while into volleys of silvery laughter.

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In this same book is another queer tradesman, whom Dickens himself hailed as a great find. The early numbers of *Our Mutual Friend* were somewhat a labour to him. He had been working for some four months, producing only three numbers, when, in a letter to Forster, he joyously announced that he had discovered an "extraordinary trade" in the purlieus of Saint Giles. It was the establishment of one Mr. Venus, a preserver of animals and birds, and an articulator of human bones; one whose calling even included something in human babies. We can imagine Dickens making his way to explore this uncanny *entrepôt*, with the zest and curiosity which stirred the hearts of the palæontologists when they smelled prehistoric bones afar off in Kent's Cavern; or the prying propensity of Wordsworth's naturalist, whose obsession for specimens would move him even to

"Peep and botanise at his mother's grave."

We can see the great student of human biology passing along the streets by way of Clerkenwell, as Silas Wegg did, noting the innumerable types of craftsmen and shops in this teeming quarter of artisans, "where cunning artificers work in pearls and diamonds," and where the trading population are mingled with "the poorer shops of "small retail traders . . . and Italian frame-makers, "barbers, brokers and dealers in dogs and singing birds." We can well imagine that, like Heine, he was fascinated by the romance of London streets, and "the rushing "stream of living human faces, with all their motley "passions, all their terrible impulses of love, of hunger, "and of hate." And, like Heine, when he stood to stare and reflect upon it all, he was probably "hustled about "on every side, or even knocked over, with a mild "God damn."

When Silas arrives at his mysterious destination he is greeted with a "good evening," and a shop-smell that is "musty, leathery, feathery, cellarly, gluey, gummy,

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“with a sniff of strong old bellows.” The man with the strange name of Venus harbours a strange love, prematurely crossed or articulated, and of the death’s-head-and-bones kind, consorting with the ghoulish trophies of his art. He was altogether a whimsically moody man. “The face looking up is a sallow face with weak eyes, surmounted by a tangle of reddish-dusty hair. The owner of the face has no cravat on and has opened his tumbled shirt collar to work with the more ease. . . . His eyes are like the over-tired eyes of an engraver, but he is not that, his expression and stoop are like those of a shoemaker, but he is not that.” His trade is evidently quite a heterogeneity of small mechanisms and motley ingenuities of craft.

“‘Oh, dear me, dear me,’ sighs Mr. Venus heavily, snuffing the candle, ‘the world that appeared so flowery has ceased to blow. You’re casting your eye round the shop, Mr. Wegg. Let me show you a light. My working bench. My young man’s bench. A wice. Tools. Bones, various. Skulls, various. Preserved India baby. African ditto. Bottled preparations, various. . . . What’s in those hampers over them again, I don’t quite remember. Say human, various. Cats. Articulated English baby. Dogs. Ducks. Glass eyes, various. Oh, dear me! That’s the general panoramic view.’”

The figure of Venus against a background of craft-mystery and curios at once catches our interest as a novel tableau. Wegg’s wooden dignity as a *littérateur* conceals a surprising amount of rascality, and yet he is always refreshingly ludicrous. He stumps into the most amusing pit-falls in his over-reaching craftiness; and, in his discomfiture and crestfallen condition, cuts a ridiculous figure to the last. Venus is a better man, being more sinned against than sinning. And the point where the articulator of bones literally throws Wegg’s anatomy

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and his wooden leg away from him, escapes his influence, and discloses his crafty plots, is a pleasing *dénouement*. Both characters are quite real; although that of Venus, being a special discovery, is perhaps less familiar than that of the street vendor, who survived till late in Victorian times.

Another and contrasting type of Dickensian characterisation in the genus "queer tradesmen," is found in Quilp. Dickens's love of delineating weird and fantastic personages finds its culmination in the demoniac dwarf. He could not exactly be termed a wharfman, or, indeed, as following any particular trade at all. His queer, sordid, and money-grabbing qualities took him into many mysterious riverside and diversified pursuits of huckstering, money-lending, smuggling, rent collecting, and even into City speculations and connections. He was rich and grasping to the very tips of his ugly claws. A hideous creature of cunning and ferocity, "he was so low in stature as to be quite a dwarf, though his head and face were large enough for the body of a giant. His black eyes were restless, sly and cunning, his mouth and chin bristly with the stubble of a coarse hard beard; and his complexion was one of that kind which never looks wholesome. But what added most to the grotesque expression of his face was a ghastly smile, which, appearing to be the mere result of habit, and to have no connection with any mirthful or complacent feeling, constantly revealed the few discoloured fangs that were yet scattered in his mouth, and gave him the aspect of a panting dog."

Quilp had an impish familiar at the wharf, in the person of a typical Cockney waif, Tom Scott. Despite the fact that he was habitually beaten and abused, he was one of the few who was not mortally afraid of the ogre, Quilp. A queer sort of liking had this urchin for his ghoulish master, and he had a knowing way of

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showing him grotesque defiance by standing on his head and elevating his feet at him, provoking him to diabolic rage—a proceeding excruciatingly laughable.

Quilp's ogre-like qualities were not merely of soul, but of body, too. He revelled in his misbegotten and repulsive anatomy, and used it to frighten and dominate with gloating malice his wife and her mother, Mrs. Jiniwin. Conscious of his own bogey-like appearance, he would boggle with them—now in affectation of bland or overflowing affection, and now in hobgoblin malignance—as his diabolic mood prompted. His hard-grained body seemed of adamant resistance in all its tissues, as his soul resisted the impact of any moral or human influences.

He could resist fatigue or sleep as if he were a vampire of the night. He had the gorging propensity of a cormorant or a hyena, and the digestion of an ostrich. There is an element of fiendish humour in his dispersal of his wife's tea-party. His smile, like a grin of pain, and his monkey-like and fantastic antics, were played off on all whom he chose to over-awe. His pranks even extended to the eating of hard eggs, shell and all, the devouring of gigantic prawns, head, tail and bristles, the swallowing of boiling tea without winking, and the chewing of tobacco with water-cresses.

In Quilp, Dickens has attained to his highest level of queer portraiture—"queer" in the humorous sense. For Quilp as a criminal and the embodiment of evil is a separate consideration. It is in the weird and fantastic blend of humour, with quite Satanic qualities, that the sense of uniqueness in characterisation is conveyed. He was destitute of any sort of humanity. His gloating love of wickedness; his hatred of goodness like Kit's; his joy in inflicting and watching pain; his conscious use of his repulsiveness to frighten and harass his victims (even Sampson Brass was afraid of being murdered by

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him); his hunchy and villainous overtures to Little Nell; these and many other inhuman propensities almost seem to place him on a level with those preternatural portraiture of evil in classic literature. Even Milton's Satan was not wholly evil; he preserved the God-like attribute of capacity for compassion and remorse. Pluto wept "iron tears." Mephistopheles, whom Carlyle said "never loved a living soul," had some touches of light humour. But Quilp is purely impish and fantastic—a species of weird *diablerie*. His end is an unspeakable satisfaction; and it is good that Dickens made this misbegotten dragon of the Thames slime return at last to his native element.

But one could go on for ever. There are many scenes of queer tradesmen from which one could muster a little army of oddities as well as dignities, grave as well as gay; all invested in the distinctive realities, humours, or pathos of their calling. The fact is, Dickens deliberately chose his characters for delineation in the realisms of their everyday life. Who does not remember Durdles, the Stonemason of Cloisterham Cathedral Graveyard; dull as a beetle, whited as a sepulchre with the dust of his craft, always "tiddledy," and never more than half-alive amongst the tombstones, the chips and chards of his petrified surroundings; or Jack Bunsby, Captain of the "Cautious Clara," with his one stationary and one revolving eye—the infallible guide, philosopher, and friend of Captain Cuttle, ready to deliver an opinion on any subject in the world "as would give Parliament six and beat 'em"? Who does not recall the ghoul of the old clothes shop who scared poor little David Copperfield with his "Goroo: Oh, my lungs and liver will you go for 3d."? Who can forget the queer-eyed, poetic young John Chivery of the tobacconist's shop in the Boro', who so faithfully and sentimentally loved Little Dorrit at a silent distance; or Mr. Pancks, the wire-

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headed collector of rents, who, grimy-handed, was always scouring and buffeting Bleeding Heart Yard for weekly doles, snorting and puffing along like a perspiring steam-engine; or the lazy French scoundrel, Rigaud, the *chevalier d'industrie*, whose sinister moustache went up under his nose, and his nose came down over his moustache; or Mr. Mantalini, the man about town, who in the end is found turning the mangle of a vixenish washerwoman; or Poll Sweedlepipe, bird fancier and easy shaver, and his colleagues of the surgical calling, Crofts, Slithers, and Jenkinson and Gibbs; or Jerry Cruncher, the messenger of Tellson's Bank, whose pious wife was always in deadly fear of his body-snatching propensities; or Chops, the dwarf in "Going into Society," who was an uncommonly small man ("certainly not so small as he was made out to be, but where is your dwarf as is") who was always in love with a large woman?

And what a world of pathos, humour, and romance did Dickens make out of the toymaking trade: the poor, grey-haired, dejected Caleb Plummer, who created out of his inner consciousness a world of romance for his blind daughter to be happy in, and who lived in a little cracked nut-shell of a shanty that stuck to the premises of Messrs. Gruff and Tackleton like a barnacle on a ship's bottom! And who will ever forget the queer little Jenny Wren, the doll's dressmaker, weird and deformed, yet sweet and lovable? And is not Miss Mowcher, the droll dwarf hairdresser and dealer in cosmetics, of the queerest and yet the most real? And is not another Miss La Creevy, the mincing young lady of fifty, who wore a yellow head-dress, a gown to correspond, and was much the same colour herself? She painted miniatures excellently, and found a suitable partner in old Tim Linkinwater at the end of the story.

And then there are the Undertakers, who furnished a little world of queer humour and philosophy for Dickens

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to revel in; Mould, a little bald elderly man, who always paid out his professional melancholy with a blend of odd smirks of satisfaction; the ponderous Mr. Omer, of Yarmouth, who was so jolly and big that you wondered how he could ever be got into one of his own coffins; and Mr. Sowerberry, the *sour berry* of all funerals; and Mr. Tacker, the obese, who "from constant blowing in the atmosphere of burials had run to seed." And so on, and so on. In this queer world on the verge of the grave, Dickens set many queer humours. And as he says, in reflecting on the death of Little Nell, "In the "Destroyer's steps there spring up bright creatures that "defy his power, and his dark path becomes a way of "light to Heaven."

CHAPTER V.

THE CRIMINALS.

“If great criminals told the truth—which, being great criminals they do not—they would very rarely tell of their struggles against the crime. Their struggles are towards it. They buffet with opposing waves to gain the bloody shore, not to recede from it.”

Our Mutual Friend. Book III. Chap. II.

WHAT may be termed, not invidiously, Dickens's theatrical sense, is to be observed in one form or another throughout the whole of his stories: he had the spirit and the temperament of the actor, and his fiction frequently bears the stamp of dramatic design. At times he may be seen to slip into the quite too theatrical manner, both in the tragedy and the comedy lines; but, broadly speaking, we may regard this dramatic tendency as just the legitimate expression of careful thought in the planning of effective plot, episode, humour, or pathos. Sometimes it develops into art of the highest kind, and it must be granted that this is mostly the case in his treatment of the criminal and tragic side of life.

“It is the custom on the stage in all good murderous “melodrama,” he says in *Oliver Twist*, “to present the “tragic and the comic scenes, in regular alternation, as “the layers of red and white in a side of streaky bacon.” Quite curiously, as if in deliberate design, Dickens's most tragic story, *Oliver Twist*, follows hard on the heels of his most humorous, *The Pickwick Papers*. For a young author, whose rise to assured fame and prosperity was marked by the ebullient humour and the extravaganza of adventure portrayed in *Pickwick*, this appeared a bold move. Whether it had the theatrical design of the “streaky bacon” or not, the issue at least proved the versatility of his genius. From the publication of

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Oliver Twist he may be seen to devote himself to depicting the life of the poor and lowly. And here he plunges at once *in medias res*.

From *Pickwick* to the deeper note of tragi-comedy, culminating in the direst piece of tragedy ever depicted in modern fiction, constitutes a remarkable transit. From the romping fun of the inimitable *Pickwick* and the Wellers, *et hœc genus omne*, to the underworld of the East End of London, is a passage of such daring as to evoke our wondering admiration. In that last remove we find two of the most vivid types of Dickens's criminal characters—Bill Sikes and Fagin, the Jew. The two figures are familiar enough: the breeched, coarse-calved, ugly-booted hulk and his bull-tyke, and the subtle, gloating, black-hearted, fawning Jew. And so powerful is the consummating dramatic element at the close of the story in which these two figure, that in his last public readings Dickens was greatly disturbed lest his proposed rendering should prove unsuitable to the prevailing taste. Dickens sought to revive the tradition of the unattractive in crime rather than the attractive, the repulsive rather than the romantic. In this he followed Hogarth. "I saw," he says, "many strong reasons for pursuing my course. I had read of thieves by the score; seductive fellows (amiable for the most part), faultless in dress, plump in pocket, choice in horseflesh, bold in bearing, fortunate in gallantry, great at song, a bottle, pack of cards, or dice-box, and fit companions for the bravest. But I had never met (except in Hogarth) with the miserable reality."

Dickens was also attracted to the study of poverty and its concomitants. Like Hogarth, he desired to teach that vice and crime tend insensibly to misery and shame. Whilst it is true that his method and art differed from that of the great engraver and draughtsman, he neverthe-

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less succeeded in his main object, which was to set a counterblast to the current vogue of the alluring villain and the gaudy highwayman, such as strutted through the pages of Sir Edward Bulwer's *Paul Clifford*, and were later extolled in novels like Ainsworth's *Jack Sheppard*. He tried to show crime in all its squalor and deformity, to picture associates in crime as they really existed, "skulking uneasily through the dirtiest paths of life, with the great black ghastly gallows closing up their prospect, turn where they might."

Dickens's extraordinary fecundity in the creation of characters followed a natural path of genius and a natural law of art: this became especially remarkable, the more closely we contemplate it. Most people would say that it was as humourist that Dickens became great, and they would, of course, be right. No wider appeal than the appeal to the sense of humour could more surely secure greatness, other conditions being granted in due proportion. The sense of humour in man is universal: it is laughter which marks off all men from the animal world. But there is another sense equally common to mankind: it is the sense of the tragic. "Man is born to sorrow as the sparks fly upward." Evil bulks largely in the world: the tragedy of pain and sorrow is as universal as the sense of the comic, and the universality of the sense of the tragic is rooted in the supreme fact that man is born to die. "There are two things in which all men are manifestly and unmistakably equal," says Mr. G. K. Chesterton; "They are not equally clever or equally muscular or equally fat. . . . But there is a spiritual certainty that all men are tragic. And this again, is an equally sublime spiritual certainty, that all men are comic."

Elsewhere I have made an attempt to show that it is of the essential character of humour to imply

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or embody the sense of the tragic. This was the very essence of the Dickensian humour. The source of it was found to be very near and greatly akin to the source of tears.

That Dickens was powerfully conscious of the tragic in life is seen in the enormous number and variety of criminal characters which he created. Like Balzac, Dumas, and Victor Hugo, Dickens seemed to have conceived the idea of collecting biological types, and especially tragic types, of human character; classifying and describing them as a naturalist would his biological specimens; throwing up the landscape of their natural habitat and environment.

That early in life Dickens studied both crime and criminals is demonstrated in such sketches as "A Visit to Newgate," "Criminal Courts," "Scotland Yard," "The Hospital Patient," and many others. That he formed definite views of crime and the psychology of the criminal, will be apparent by turning to many of the articles in "*The Miscellaneous Papers*" like "Crime and Education," "Capital Punishment," "Ignorance and Crime," "Pet Prisoners," "The Murdered Person," "The Demeanour of Murderers."

The last-mentioned article is a remarkable piece of psychological analysis in which the mental pose, the thought-stuff of the criminal mind, the very ebb and flow of the inner life of William Palmer, the notorious poisoner of the "fifties," are all most convincingly portrayed. In *Hunted Down*, we find, in fictional form, a similar study of the famous Wainwright, Slinkton being the murderer posed for that purpose. The article on "Capital Punishment" is, similarly, just as remarkable for its penetrative insight into the movements of the criminal mind in relation to the presence, the menace, and the stimulus of the gallows as an instrument of

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impending doom and punishment. It is clear that the conception of this particular article, written in 1846, is the same as that which dominated his mind in 1837-'39 when writing *Oliver Twist*, and which he renewed in 1841, when he gave us that lurid story of the Gordon Riots in *Barnaby Rudge*.

It will be agreed that Dickens did not frequently employ the method of psychological analysis in depicting character, but that he was always capable of it is obvious from the way in which he penetrated to the inmost soul of criminal characters. He knew their mental attitudes. He discerned the course and flow of their very thoughts, and could track the rise and divarication of their evil tendencies; and what is more, he could relate them all to the watershed of their environment in the general map, so to speak, of crime.

Looking out at us from his voluminous pages are ghastly murderers like Sikes, Fagin, Rudge, Jonas Chuzzlewit, Mademoiselle Hortense, Jack the murderer in *The Hospital Patient*, Slinkton, and Warden; creatures of deadly passion, hatred, or jealousy, like Bradley Headstone, John Jasper, Ralph Nickleby, Rosa Dartle; exquisite villains like Rigaud, Monks, Carker, Cashford, Chester, and Littimer; ruffians like Quilp, Ned Dennis, Jerry Cruncher, Rogue Riderhood, Squeers, the Jacques and the Defarges of the French Revolution; and Stagg, the blind villain, unique in the literature of crime, whose miraculous craftiness, despite his infirmity, fell short of murder only because it never happened to be "worth his while."

Then there are convicts like Compeyson, Magwitch, Alice Brown, Kags, John Edmunds, and Brooker; robbers, thieves, and burglars, like Toby Crackit, the Artful Dodger, Noah Claypole, Dr. Dundey, a bank robber, Shepherdson, a butcher-thief, Tally-Ho Thomp-

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son, a horse-stealer, Couper and "Magsman," and "The Earl of Warwick."

There are also forgers and financial swindlers like Merdle, Fikey, Mesheck the Jew, Fascination Fledgeby, the Brasses, Zephaniah Scadder the American swindler, Montague Tigg and his friend Chevy Slyme, Bonny of the Muffin Co., Captain Walter Walters, and Sir Mulberry Hawk. In the bulk, they constitute a veritable Chamber of Horrors!

Some of these low types of ruffian character are from the shorter stories and sketches. They are none the less vividly drawn. All are plucked out of the grim underworld with which Dickens was so intimately acquainted. All are tragic in their varied moods and tenses, while some are exquisite studies in crime. All, however, do not possess the Aristotelian requisite of tragedy proper, namely, magnitude. We will, therefore, select the more prominent and familiar types and the broader canvasses of crime so that we may the more easily discern where Dickens rises to the highest planes of power in the realm of tragedy.

Let us first take *Oliver Twist*, where, in the earliest flush of his popularity and the out-flow of his genius, Dickens concentrated his powers of delineation in crime. In it we have a whole group of criminals, with Fagin the Jew and Sikes the burglar constituting the focus of their dark and nefarious doings. Here we see the Dickensian idea of the gallows as the instigation of crime; for without doubt the most pronounced background feature of this knot of criminal characters is that they all live in defiant fear of the overhanging sword of Damocles—the ever-present dread of exposure from one another. In fact, the gravamen of Fagin's superlative villainy is in his subtle devices to prevent his associates getting him "lagged," should they ever be disposed to do so. On the other hand, he has deeply laid devices to

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clear the foul air of his being by unscrupulously getting to the gallows all who may endanger his own reptile life. Almost at the moment of his introduction to the reader we find him gloating miser-like over a secret hoard of jewellery, which arouses the thought: "What a fine thing capital punishment is! Dead men never repent; dead men never bring awkward stories to light. Ah, it's a fine thing for the trade! Five of 'em strung up in a row, and none left to play booty, or turn white-livered!"

In the foul atmosphere of Fagin's kitchen there is frequent bickering and suspicions on the dread theme of "lagging," and in this single speech there is thrown a lurid light on the hellish character of this lair of crime, and the significant relation of capital punishment to its existence and its perpetuation. Fagin's secret power over his brethren in crime, and his own idea to avoid the gallows, is further seen in his visit to that den of iniquity, "The Cripples," where were men and women whose countenances were expressive of almost every vice in almost every grade, where "cunning, ferocity, and drunkenness in all its stages were there in their strange aspects. . . ."

"'I say,' said the landlord, who was acting as chair-man of a convivial, 'what a time this would be for a sell! I've got Phil Barker here: so drunk that a boy might take him.'

"'Aha! But it's not Phil Barker's time,' said the Jew, looking up, 'Phil has something more to do before we can afford to part with him; so go back to the company, my dear, and tell them to lead merry lives—while they last. Ha! ha! ha!'"

In the hands of this arch-traitor the fear of hanging is made the means of actually holding his gang together and of weeding out the unfit, preserving its integrity,

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and perpetuating its loathsome existence. Towards the end of the story, when Nancy arouses suspicions by her visits to Rose Maylie, Fagin begins to realise the opportunity of ridding himself of Sikes, and here the Jew is seen in the height of his perfidy. Nancy has been determined somehow to save Oliver, and she dimly understands that there is some chance for herself. Virile in her guiltiness, as she is strong to the last in her newborn rectitude, she is never quite on the same plane with the rest of the gang in this sink of knavery and brutality. She and her paramour, Sikes, in fact, somehow make Rose Maylie and her lover appear less real and vital, even if not entirely insignificant. In her visits to Rose she is always careful not to risk Bill, to whom, brutal as he is, she preserves the virtue of fealty and devotion. But, suspicions once aroused, the black-hearted Fagin immediately contemplates the probabilities of turning things to his own advantage: he imagines Nancy is tired of Bill's brutality.

“There was another and a darker object to be gained. Sikes knew too much, and his ruffian taunts had not galled Fagin the less, because the wounds were hidden. The girl must know, well, that if she shook him off she could never be safe from his fury. . . . ‘With a little persuasion,’ thought Fagin, ‘what more likely than that she would consent to poison him? Women have done such things. . . . There would be the dangerous villain: the man I hate: gone; another secured in his place; and my influence over the girl, with the knowledge of this crime to back it up, unlimited.’”

With the determination to enjoy a new lease of power and perfection of ease and safety, he prepared to resort to the most cunning and consummate villainy: he at once sets a watch on the woman; but subsequent discoveries

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destroy all his plans. The picture of his black mortification and his foaming hatred of the girl who has dared to palter with strangers, his craven and crouching fear of detection, ruin, and death, are all a fearsome portrait of the anatomy and perturbations of the criminal mind. He has only to whisper hints of the real state of things to Bill Sikes, and the poor girl's doom is sealed.

Gissing once said that Dickens commenced in *Oliver Twist* to try his hand at character-drawing in men and women of exceptionally strong passions, but generally failed. He instances Monks; but, strangely enough, omits to consider either Sikes or Fagin. He concedes Dickens some success with Bradley Headstone, the schoolmaster—by no means the most convincing or real of portraits. Fagin is so real and perfect a figure of malignant and heinous passions, that, were he not the central actor in a group of criminal characters, into which some relief of humour can be injected, he would be too entirely repellent. That facetious young thief, the Artful Dodger, is like Sam Weller, a humourist, and the laughter of the boy, Charley Bates, is contagious. The "softy," Tom Chitling, adds also to the lighter element, and the pathetic figure of the pure little Oliver in such sordid surroundings completes that diversity of character and interest which at once grips us.

The picture of the shrivelled old Jew, with villainous-looking face and matted red hair, with a dirty bare throat and a long greasy flannel covering; the blackened walls of the den, with sack-made beds for the boys, his darling apprentices, who were sitting about smoking clay pipes and drinking spirits with the air of middle-aged men, the clothes-horse covered with the stolen silk pocket-handkerchiefs—all constitute a convincing picture of an interior which may well be imagined to correspond with certain sinister-looking exteriors in the environs of old Saffron Hill.

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The Jew's rage at the loss of Oliver, who has fallen into the hands of the "traps"—otherwise the police—marks the commencement of a course of cunning to recover him, the prime motives of which are gain from Monks, Oliver's half-brother, and the fear of getting "lagged." In the middle of the disturbance and the consternation enters the burly, brawling Bill Sikes, with Bull's Eye, the tyke—a dramatic entry, for the burglar has received the contents of a whirling beer-pot in his face, and it at once arouses his native ire.

It is now apparent that, although accomplices in crime, there is mutual hatred and distrust between these two, Sikes and Fagin. Although the Jew craftily conceals his enmity behind his cackling laugh, his cozening manner and his grovelling, abject behaviour, Sikes, on the other hand, is coarsely, brutally, and even aggressively blunt. The wonderful thing about him, and, indeed, the whole gang, is that he uses "language"; and yet not one vile word escapes him. We feel, however, that although not one of the sordid crew gives vent to foul utterances, they each and all, in reality, curse with every breath. Few novelists have ever been able to convey such atmosphere without the use of foul and obnoxious expletives; but Dickens's art is quite equal to the task he sets himself at the outset—to give us a view of the very dregs of life and low character, without offending the ear or the eye with their "native" speech, except in so far as it partakes of the character of humorous slang.

"What are you up to? Ill-treating the boys, you covetous, in-sa-ti-a-ble old fence?" said Sikes, seating himself deliberately, and wiping the beer off his face. "I wonder they don't murder you! I would if I was them. If I'd been your apprentice I'd have done it long ago, and—no, I couldn't have sold you after-

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“ ‘wards, for you’re fit for nothing but keeping as a
“ ‘curiosity of ugliness in a glass bottle, and I suppose
“ ‘they don’t blow glass bottles large enough.’

“ ‘Hush! Hush! Mr. Sikes,’ said the Jew, trembling;
“ ‘don’t speak so loud.’

“ ‘None of your mistering,’ replied the ruffian; ‘you
“ ‘always mean mischief when you come that. You
“ ‘know my name: out with it. I shan’t disgrace it
“ ‘when the time comes.’ ”

Always the listening apprehension and the bickering,
with Tyburn Tree in the distance. Always the pas-
sionate jealousy and mutual distrust of the power to
“lag” or lay one another by the heels. Always, as
Merèdith somewhere says, “they walked in the haunted
“forest of experience where whispers have intensity of
“meaning; where unseeing they are conscious of being
“seen and unaware awaited.”

“ ‘Given away,’ said Sikes . . . surveying him with
“savage contempt. ‘You’ll never have the laugh of me,
“ ‘though, unless it’s behind a nightcap. I’ve got the
“ ‘upper hand of you, Fagin; and, d—— me, I’ll keep
“ ‘it. There! If I go, you go; so take care of *me!*’ ”

In all this sordid gang of thieves, and worse, Nancy
represents the soul of goodness in things evil. Of rugged
virtue, mixed with ragged vice; she is just the bit of
human slag in which, as Whitman declares, there
“nestles the seed, perfection.” Henry Morley once said,
“The good soil is everywhere in the minds of men, and
everywhere in the common ground lies that of which
the fruit shall come.” So we are compelled to wonder
whether even Fagin hasn’t a tiny soft place in his black
heart when he leaves poor little Oliver, pale as death, to
sleep till morning before he delivers him over to Sikes
for the burglary. “Not now,” said the Jew, turning
softly away. “To-morrow—to-morrow.” Had Fagin

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any pity in his traitorous nature when he warned Oliver : " Take heed, Oliver ! Take heed ! Sikes is a rough man, " and thinks nothing of blood when his own is up. " Whatever falls out, say nothing and do what he bids " you, mind ! " Is there reflected in this anything more than a cunning self-interest ? Has the blatant, bullying, adamant nature of Bill Sikes a microscopic spot in his hardened heart, worm-eaten by the ticking of the death-watch, when he seeks Nancy's hand on his sick-bed, and, falling asleep under the influence of her drugging, vows, in spite of his doubts, that " there ain't a stauncher-hearted girl going ? "

These Dickensian touches are so delicately given that we can hardly tell. We only know that when in the underworld amongst the poorest and most degraded, the roughest and most rugged creatures commanded Dickens's deepest sympathy just as the purest souls of his creation commanded his greatest grief at their sufferings : witness the death of Little Nell.

On the other hand, he never forgets the stern laws of moral proportion nor the due retribution of crime. In a brief, vivid sketch, Nancy is seen to succumb rapidly to the brutal violence of the robber who, in his turn, suffers the prolonged agony of a soul in Hell. The murder of Nancy by Bill Sikes is impressive enough and very real : we are not surprised that it should arouse the hatred of the populace, nor that its perpetrator should be hounded to his death, nor that his vilest associates should shrink from him, nor that young Charley Bates should be so maddened and should afterwards be moved towards a better life. The whole story is told with a power that it is dramatic, simple, human, convincing and true.

The retribution which follows on such perfidy and crime is swift : the mind at once becomes introspective.

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There is a lesion of the moral order; and it is a dual one. It has an inward as well as an outward effect: the inner is the replica and reflection of the outer. Fear deadens and debilitates; the tortures of a guilty imagination induce delirium and hallucination; restless and resistless phases of doubt follow in agonising succession. There is an unceasing round of passional and emotive activities in tension; and, setting inwards, they submerge the volitions and the will. Against this concentrated whirl of the moral blood, nothing lifts except some more powerful flux of passion. Sikes wanders ceaselessly round and round, returning in wide circuits to where he started. Fagin's body is imprisoned but his *mind* wanders in delirium round itself, as Sikes skulks his tortured and tortuous way. Out of the tension of his agony the Jew is never lifted: we see it both in the cell and in the Court: it is, in fact, the culminating phase of a cumulative Nemesis which we may see taking its inexorable course from the first moment of his introduction into the story.

With Sikes the impressive scene of the fire in the country lifts him temporarily, but only temporarily. He shouts and works in the thickest of the throng, but, with the blackened ruins of the dawn, he sees again the ruins of his own soul; the inward tension and torture return with tenfold force; the phantom with the dead woman's eyes continues to haunt him. At last, out of the brutal strength which is his natural possession, is evolved a desperate resolution. He returns to his old haunts. A heated and congested populace assails him as if it were the outward symbol of his inward perturbations. His fierce resistance, like a cornered rat in a sewer, and his accidental death by a rope which is not the hangman's all combine to make a fitting close to his career of brute passion. As in the death of Quilp, justice

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is satisfied, moral equilibrium is restored, London is revenged, the mob disperses, and these filthy environs are cleansed of one more cesspool of iniquity.

That curious idea which obsessed Sikes of wandering round and always coming back, in the agony of his remorse and fear, to where he started, is repeated in Bradley Headstone's tortuous and torturing coming and going to and from the fatal spot where Rogue Riderhood is to be found. It seems to be the perpetual "urge, urge, urge," as Whitman would have, of the criminal impulse; the half-conscious desire to complete his design on Wrayburn by getting Riderhood out of the way. And what, for want of a better expression, may be called the inner Nemesis, is as faithfully reproduced in Headstone as in Sikes or Fagin.

This unmistakable gift of Dickens's to depict both the outward movement of stern circumstance, and the inward movement of the guilty mind, is once more well seen in the case of Rudge, the father of the demented Barnaby. In the case of Sikes and Fagin we see more clearly, perhaps, the immediate and catastrophic element in their punishment: the same with the mean and villainous Jonas Chuzzlewit. In the case of Rudge, however, the Nemesis action lengthens out. For many years Rudge skulks through his life a criminal at large, the murderer of Reuben Haredale. And it is in the latter part of this period that we see the typical working out of that fateful course of justice which ultimately brings him to Tyburn, an obdurate and unrepentant felon.

His son Barnaby, the hero of the story, is a remarkable and unique piece of portraiture. He is invested with a strange pathos and a vivid interest. With his pet raven, his strange combination of keen and perverted wits, and his attachment to his fond mother,

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he makes a weird, picturesque figure, with a peculiar pull upon our affections and our concern. The feeling that he is the outward and visible symbol of parental wrong slowly grows upon us as we watch him and his lonely, broken mother wend their way through the passing events, among the varied, lighter, and brighter characters of the story. This feeling grows upon us as we see the true nature of his lurking criminal parent, until it becomes a complete revelation at the interview of Mrs. Rudge with her husband in his cell towards the close. "The Hand of Him," she says, "who sets His curse on murder is heavy on us now. You cannot doubt it. Our son, our innocent boy on whom His anger fell before his birth, is in this place in peril of his life—brought here by your guilt; yes, by that alone . . . for he has been led astray in the darkness of his intellect, and that is the terrible consequence of your crime."

Rudge's miserable, lurking, restless life, besmirched with crime, peeps out through the bright and wholesome episodes of the story, with here and there an outburst of raging speech which tells of the inner misery and suffering and degradation of the man. The scene of *Barnaby Rudge* is laid in a period when executions occurred weekly, and the populace were brutalised by their public character; when even young people were hanged for the most trivial thefts; when from every part of London swarmed a jostling crowd of every phase of rough and degraded character, spreading the contamination of vice and coarseness with every exhibition. All these things left their indelible marks upon the *morale* of the period. Dickens's picture of the degradation of the common people, and the multiplicity of the criminal classes, gathers in intensity as the story proceeds, until it culminates in the lurid horror of the

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burning of Newgate and the letting loose of the prisoners by the rioters. From every nook and cranny of the filthy parts of the old city there swarms a drunken raging mob. Every haunt of vice and ignorance yields its quota of festering humanity, which sweeps over the streets and the suburbs to the countryside even, like a plague, carrying with it all excesses of passion and crime. In this background of obliquity lurks the hunted outcast Rudge; and in one of the outrages of the mob, the burning of Mr. Haredale's house, he arrives on the scene, only to be recognised and seized by the brother of his victim and lodged in Newgate.

But his punishment by the grim instrument of the law is vividly seen to be a mere drop in the ocean of his retribution. The foul atmosphere of evil conditions, which gathers to its greatest intensity in the burning of Newgate by the rioters, and through which always looms the ominous gallows, is a dramatic artifice, designed to intensify and illuminate the real nature of the murderer's punishment. Rudge slinks through his life; and we see him constantly befouled and brutalised by the moral filth which the looming symbol of punishment itself engenders. The gallows stands out always like the ghoulish fetish of some heathen rite. The criminal poltroon, Ned Dennis the hangman, always keeps it well within our purview; he is its chief priest and worshipper; he regards it as the moral instrument for "working off" the wicked. But the reader catches a deeper significance and a wider meaning. As in the knot of criminals, of which Fagin and Sikes are the centre, we watch its direct influence in the perpetuation of evil rather than in its punishment or prevention, so here we realise its indirect influence as well. Even the hangman feels its fatal fascination, and, forsaking the verminous priesthood of Tyburn Tree, mingles with the

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crowd of devil-worshippers outside the temple. The mordant humour which makes him at once the victim and the worshipper of the foul instrument of punishment is a characteristically Dickens touch.

Hugh, the gipsy, who has led the mob, clinches this thought for us on the morning of the execution. When brought to the foot of the gallows he gets a vision of the truth Dickens himself has never failed to thrust home: "Raising his right arm aloft, and looking upward like a savage prophet whom the near approach of Death had filled with inspiration, he says to the Clergyman who ministers the last solemn rites, 'What else should teach me, me, born as I was born and reared as I have been reared . . . Upon these human shambles, I who have never raised this hand in prayer till now, call down the wrath of God! On that black tree, of which I am the ripened fruit, I do invoke the curse of all its victims, past, and present, and to come.'"

Thus it would seem that Dickens, even when he goes to the lowest depths of vice for his creations, never fails to show us something more than the mere superficial presence of personal and private wickedness. He tackles evil as a problem, and treats it as an artist and a thinker. The main feature of his treatment of his chief criminals is in setting them clearly and unmistakably in the background environment which produces them. While never neglecting to show the criminal as a unit of moral responsibility, reaping the due and just punishment which falls to evil courses, he also lays bare an element of accountability for evil, which all share collectively. He portrays a social as well as an individual Nemesis. And it is the social Nemesis to which the individual sometimes falls a victim to an extent often out of all proportion to his own delinquencies. There is a general moral climate in which every individual is born, in which

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he lives and moves and has his moral being. Whilst it is true that this reacts upon him, it is equally true that his every act contributes to it and helps to determine its common denominator. Man, the person, is an inevitably embedded unit in a given status of society. He is more than an individual; he is part of an organic and social whole, with heart-beats which synchronise with the pulsing of the common life. There is a higher reality than the personal organism. There is the social organism—a bonded plexus of innumerable lives. It is, maybe, only when we get a revelation of this great truth through the discipline of suffering, of self-knowledge, or of self-realisation, that we perceive that by affinities of nature and destiny we are all bound to the common weal or the common woe. There is, therefore, a moral law supervening above and beyond the will and act of man the person. It influences huge masses of peoples, as it did, for instance, in the Gordon Riots and the French Revolution. Consciously or unconsciously we adapt our puny lives to it: consciously or unconsciously we become happy or miserable according to the inevitable adjustments of its moral order. That there is no doctrine of fatality about this is seen in the revelation which great minds like Victor Hugo and Charles Dickens received through suffering or reflection. In fact, in every department of modern thought this great truth appears to be manifesting itself; and this vision of our poor humanity broken upon the wheel of fate becomes the incentive for greater and greater efforts of the collective will in adjusting and diffusing the common burden of life. It is here, in such prophetic intuition, that is rooted the power of all great thinkers and teachers. One can scarcely read a line of Dickens without feeling the influence of his penetration into the real nature of man. It is the source and inspiration of all his power of tragic portrayal and of satiric

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portraiture: it is likewise the cardinal genius and force of his humour.

It may be that this background influence of a superimposed moral order, to which we are all accountable, and for which we share a common responsibility, is not always visible. We see it quite plainly in the case of Rudge, and Fagin, and Sikes; and Slinkton who murders his niece for the sake of the insurance money; but perhaps not quite so clearly in the case of Mademoiselle Hortense who murders Mr. Tulkinghorn; nor in Jonas Chuzzlewit who attempts the murder of his father, and who accomplishes the murder of Tigg; nor in Bradley Headstone the schoolmaster, whose violent passions impel him to attempt the murder of Eugene Wrayburn, and who in accomplishing the death of Rogue Riderhood loses his own life in the act; nor so much in the case of Brooker, the felon and outcast of *Nicholas Nickleby* who incites Ralph to persecute and hunt his own child to death, and who, when all his illicit machinations are defeated, is submerged in his own violent passions and hangs himself in a mingled frenzy of hatred, remorse, and despair; nor in the case of Warden in *The Drunkard's Death*, whose degradation brings his two sons to the crime of murder and his daughter to the streets; nor in the case of Jack in *The Hospital Patient*, who beats his paramour to death—a miniature picture of Sikes and Nancy, and probably their literary prototype.

These are all instances of tragic punishment and expiation which fall to those who harbour mean and secret passions. But it is in just those instances where Dickens is criticised for elaborating tragic themes to the extremity of exaggeration and harrowing our feelings unnecessarily, that we feel the power of the great artist and the deep and tender thinker. For it is under the influence of his penetrative genius that he may be

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seen to sympathise with his creations, as indeed he did with all the poor and degraded. Gissing may decry some of these tragic figures as "exaggerations of lime-light frenzy," or "things of sawdust," and so forth; but for me they are real characters, as true to life and art as Macbeth or Iago. Shakespeare sometimes bestrews the stage with dead bodies and sustains our horror, our awe, or our pity, to the utmost degree of intensity. Meanwhile both the "gods" of theatrical repute and the critics professional applaud to the sky. Is it necessary then to apologise for an artistic representation of a career of wilful and woeful criminality like Fagin's any more than Macbeth's; of determined brutality and gory wickedness like Sikes's any more than Richard's; of a career of exquisite, artistic, and successful villainy like Gashford's or Carker's any more than Iago's; of passionate jealousy like Headstone's, any more than Othello's? The fact is, in the world of art there has always existed an attraction for things repulsive—paradoxical as it may seem. Dante and Doré attract us through vivid pictures of the nether regions; Milton by his delineations of the arch-fiend; Victor Hugo and Zola by their panoramas of the miserable. Craftsmen of the pen, the pencil, the brush, the chisel, portray the ugly, the grim, the gross, the coarse, the tragic, the brutal and the gloom of life and become great. Their secret of attraction is that of the artist.

Dickens carried his appeal to a wider interest and a deeper concern. If we ask ourselves what is the secret of our attraction to the tragic in life, the attraction to things in their nature repellent—whether we are poor or rich, ignorant or cultivated, whether it be through Shakespeare, Hogarth, Hugo or Dickens—we shall find it in the fact that it is after all the arresting life-history of men and women in intimate and quite natural relationships, all in their bearing upon

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the mysteries and the problems of evil. By the true artist these are presented in the glamour and mystery of enlargement, with an appeal to our native sense of consistency and ordered arrangement. Sikes, and Fagin, and Rudge, like Macbeth, are enlarged or ideal presentations of the anatomy and psychology of vice and crime. Moral proportion similarly requires an enlarged presentation of that inexorable and inflexible justice in the order of nature which brings retribution. Thus we see with greater definition and force the unfolding of human character and its moral issues; and all this within the greater law of the evolution of life and the adjustment of the affairs of mankind within the fateful circle of retributive justice. It is this magnified or ideal spectacle of the living orderly movement of human actions in their relation to the problems and the mystery of evil which is at once the basis of the tragic and its prime attraction. And it is this which constitutes the supreme moral and intellectual appeal to our common human nature. All of us are attracted to the mystery of evil, because none of us can escape its influence.

Dickens was a master of humour; he was equally a master of its concomitant emotion—horror. He who could catch and hold the laughter of the streets, could also write of the terrors that obsess the soul of man and of all its dark recesses and poisonous depths, with such resistless force and conviction that as one reads one feels the very hand of dread close upon one's very heart. No other writer since Shakespeare has possessed quite in the same degree this weird and eerie faculty for striking through to the very roots of our being.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LAWYERS.

“It’s a pleasant world we live in, sir, a very pleasant world. There are bad people in it, Mr. Richard, but if there were no bad people, there would be no good lawyers.”

The Old Curiosity Shop. Chap. 56.

ONE of the greatest of living Dickensians has remarked that, “before you can reform an institution, it is essential that you should love it.” The paradox is peculiarly applicable in the case of Charles Dickens and the Law. The creator of Jarndyce and Jarndyce was the greatest legal reformer in our history. His satires made the Judges wince, and stirred even the dry bones of Parliament itself. And yet, despite his vivid pictures of the law’s delays, his merciless caricatures of its innumerable, baffling absurdities, Dickens still loved the law.

Placed as a boy, first with Mr. Molloy, Solicitor, of New Square, Lincoln’s Inn, and subsequently with Messrs. Ellis and Blackmore, Solicitors, of Gray’s Inn—whose partner, Mr. Ellis, by the way, was said to be the original of Mr. Perker—his youthful fancies used to hover about the Georgian squares and the trim gardens of the Temple, with its sombre, quaint, old-fashioned chambers, and their winding staircases and deep, mysterious recesses.

It was probably this fascination for the purlieus of the Law, and his early association with it, that prompted him, when he was twenty-seven years of age, to enter his name among the students at the Inn of the Middle Temple, although he did not eat dinners there until many years later. Dickens was never called to the Bar, and it was Sir Frank Lockwood who credited him

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with the notable achievement of having succeeded in getting returned some part of the fees he deposited with the Benchers when he was first admitted as a student. But he nevertheless made many visits to its sacred temples and shrines. He loved its paved walks and its solemn serenities, and he painted them for us in word-pictures, vivid alike for their romantic imagery and their homely realism.

In such surroundings, Eugene Wrayburn, who had been "called" seven years, occupied, with three others, "one black hole called a set of chambers" and toyed, in a gloomy, indolent, unambitious way, with the profession he loathed, and which, apparently, he had only entered because it was understood that they "needed a barrister in his family."

Similarly, Mortimer Lightwood, his friend (and, parenthetically, "another of Veneering's oldest friends, who was never in the house before, and appears not to want to come again"), must have been "one by himself," high up an awful staircase commanding a view of a burial ground in the vicinity of Lincoln's Inn; for in another book (*Bleak House*) there is this vignette which seems to meet Lightwood's case: "We passed, with "sudden quietude, under an old gateway, and drove on "through a silent square until we came to an old nook "in a corner, where there was an entrance up a steep, "broad flight of stairs, like an entrance to a church. "And there really was a churchyard, outside some "cloisters, for I saw the gravestones from the staircase "window." Lightwood, it will be recalled, had, at the opening of the story, "been upon the honourable roll of "Solicitors of the High Court of Chancery and Attorneys "at Common Law five years, and, except gratuitously "taking instructions once a fortnight for the will of "Lady Tippins, who had nothing to leave," had received no scrap of business at all.

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Within this charmed area, or, to be precise, over at South Square, Gray's Inn, Thomas Traddles, intent on marrying "the dearest girl in the world," plodded on energetically, sometimes "stating cases" or "making abstracts," afterwards compiling an encyclopædia, and subsequently "reading for the bar," whilst "the dear girl" darned his socks and sweetened the drudgery of his life with her Devonshire songs.

When we think of these places, we recall the fact that dear old Tom Pinch and his sweet sister were wont to watch the sunshine sparkle in the fountain of Temple Garden, as "laughingly its liquid music played, and merrily the idle drops of water danced and danced"; and that Pip, one wild night heard the tread of his convict, coming up the lone staircase to his chambers, and associated the footsteps with his dead sister before he came. All these scenes and haunts of law-land, familiar enough to its practitioners, Dickens came so to know and to love, that he was able verbally to photograph them for thousands upon thousands of people scattered over the globe, until they in fancy could hear the rooks cawing in Gray's Inn, and could in imagination watch the Thames glisten beyond the cool green lawns of Paper Buildings.

But Dickens has done more than this. He has made us realise that to achieve greatness as a lawyer a man must have a strain of the heroic in him.

Probably most of us, if we sat down to describe the typical solicitor, would depict him as a rather supple, subtle, smooth, and propitiatory person. Dickens, by one of his greatest creations, has almost obliterated that view. Mr. Perker, of course, answers something of the description; his tact and diplomacy in handling the case of Miss Wardle's elopement with a fortune-hunting adventurer, as well as in the conduct of *Bardell v. Pickwick*, is beyond all praise. But then Mr. Perker is not

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so large a character as was Jaggers, Pip's guardian, in *Great Expectations*. There is no doubt that Jaggers presents the finest portrait of a fighting solicitor ever attempted in English fiction. It was, it will be remembered, in the bar parlour of the "Three Jolly Bargemen" that Jaggers, with his massive truculence, his pugnacity, his prim elemental force, first bursts upon the consciousness of young Pip.

"A highly popular murder had been committed, and Mr. Wopsle was imbrued in blood to the eyebrows. He gloated over every abhorrent adjective in the description, and identified himself with every witness at the inquest. He faintly moaned, 'I am done for,' as the victim, and he barbarously bellowed, 'I'll serve you out,' as the murderer. He gave the medical testimony, in pointed imitation of our local practitioner; and he piped and shook, as the aged turnpike-keeper who had heard blows, to an extent so very paralytic as to suggest a doubt regarding the mental competency of that witness. The coroner, in Mr. Wopsle's hands, became Timon of Athens; the beadle, Coriolanus. He enjoyed himself thoroughly; and we all enjoyed ourselves, and were delightfully comfortable. In this cozy state of mind we came to the verdict of Wilful Murder.

"Then, and not sooner, I became aware of a strange gentleman leaning over the back of the settle opposite me, looking on. There was an expression of contempt on his face, and he bit the side of a great forefinger as he watched the group of faces.

"'Well!' said the stranger to Mr. Wopsle, when the reading was done, 'you have settled it all to your own satisfaction, I have no doubt?'

"Everybody started and looked up, as if it were the murderer. He looked at everybody coldly and sarcastically.

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“‘Guilty, of course?’ said he. ‘Out with it Come!’

“‘Sir,’ returned Mr. Wopsle, ‘without having the honour of your acquaintance, I do say guilty.’ Upon this we all took courage to unite in a confirmatory manner.

“‘I know you do,’ said the stranger. ‘I knew you would. I told you so. But now I’ll ask you a question. Do you know, or do you not know, that the law of England supposes every man to be innocent, until he is proved—proved—to be guilty?’

“‘Sir,’ Mr. Wopsle began to reply, ‘as an Englishman myself, I——’

“‘Come!’ said the stranger, biting his forefinger at him. ‘Don’t evade the question. Either you know it, or you don’t know it. Which is it to be?’

“He stood with his head on one side and himself on one side, in a bullying interrogative manner, and he threw his forefinger at Mr. Wopsle—as it were to mark him out—before biting it again.

“‘Now!’ said he. ‘Do you know it, or don’t you know it?’

“‘Certainly I know it,’ replied Mr. Wopsle.

“‘Certainly you know it. Then why didn’t you say so at first? Now, I’ll ask you another question,’ taking possession of Mr. Wopsle, as if he had a right to him, ‘Do you know that none of these witnesses have yet been cross-examined?’

“Mr. Wopsle was beginning, ‘I can only say——’ when the stranger stopped him.

“‘What? You won’t answer the question, yes or no? Now, I’ll try you again.’ Throwing his finger at him again. ‘Attend to me. Are you aware, or are you not aware, that none of these witnesses have yet been cross-examined? Come, I only want one word from you. Yes, or no?’

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“‘Mr. Wopsle hesitated, and we all began to conceive rather a poor opinion of him.

“‘Come!’ said the stranger, ‘I’ll help you. You don’t deserve help, but I’ll help you. Look at that paper you hold in your hand. What is it?’

“‘What is it?’ repeated Mr. Wopsle, eyeing it much at a loss.

“‘Is it,’ pursued the stranger in his most sarcastic and suspicious manner, ‘the printed paper you have just been reading from?’

“‘Undoubtedly.’

“‘Undoubtedly. Now, turn to that paper, and tell me whether it distinctly states that the prisoner expressly said that his legal advisers instructed him altogether to reserve his defence?’

“‘I read that just now,’ Mr. Wopsle pleaded.

“‘Never mind what you read just now, sir; I don’t ask you what you read just now. You may read the Lord’s Prayer backwards, if you like—and, perhaps, have done it before to-day. Turn to the paper. No, no, no, my friend; not to the top of the column; you know better than that; to the bottom, to the bottom.’ (We all began to think Mr. Wopsle full of subterfuge.) ‘Well! Have you found it?’

“‘Here it is,’ said Mr. Wopsle.

“‘Now, follow that passage with your eye, and tell me whether it distinctly states that the prisoner expressly said that he was instructed by his legal advisers wholly to reserve his defence? Come! Do you make that of it?’

“Mr. Wopsle answered, ‘Those are not the exact words.’

“‘Not the exact words!’ repeated the gentleman, bitterly. ‘Is that the exact substance?’

“‘Yes,’ said Mr. Wopsle.

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“‘Yes,’ repeated the stranger, looking round at the rest of the company with his right hand extended towards the witness, Wopsle. ‘And now I ask you what you say to the conscience of that man who, with that passage before his eyes, can lay his head upon his pillow after having pronounced a fellow-creature guilty, unheard?’”

It was that huge menacing forefinger, as much as his air of “Knowing something secret about everyone he came in contact with,” that made the terrible Jagggers a force. The magistrates shivered under a single bite of his finger. Thieves and thief-takers hung in dread rapture on his words, and “shrank when a hair of his eyebrows turned in their direction.” His office was situated in Little Britain, “just out of Smithfield,” and his chambers were adorned with an old rusty pistol, a sword in a scabbard, and two dreadful casts of faces peculiarly swollen and twitchy about the nose. He was by way of being a poor man’s lawyer, and, as he dealt with the lowest, most ignorant and sometimes most bestial classes, he had recourse to methods which may have shocked, and still shock, the more complacent and less heroic members of his profession. His clients would swarm up and beset him as he entered his office, only to be sternly treated in this wise:—

“First, he took the two secret men.

“‘Now, I have nothing to say to *you*,’ said Mr. Jagggers, throwing his finger at them. ‘I want to know no more than I know. As to the result, it’s a toss-up. I told you from the first it was a toss-up. Have you paid Wemmick?’”

“‘We made the money up this morning, sir,’ said one of the men, submissively, while the other perused Mr. Jagggers’s face.

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“‘I don’t ask you when you made it up, or where, or whether you made it up at all. Has Wemmick got it?’

“‘Yes, sir,’ said both the men together.

“‘Very well; then you may go. Now, I won’t have it!’ said Mr. Jaggers, waving his hand at them to put them behind him. ‘If you say a word to me, I’ll throw up the case.’

“‘We thought, Mr. Jaggers—’ one of the men began, pulling off his hat.

“‘That’s what I told you not to do,’ said Mr. Jaggers. ‘*You* thought! I think for you; that’s enough for you. If I want you, I know where to find you; I don’t want you to find me. Now, I won’t have it. I won’t hear a word.’

The two men looked at one another as Mr. Jaggers waved them behind again, and humbly fell back and were heard no more.

“‘And now *you!*’ said Mr. Jaggers, suddenly stopping, and turning on the two women with the shawls, from whom the three men had meekly separated—‘Oh! Amelia, is it?’

“‘Yes, Mr. Jaggers.’

“‘And do you remember,’ retorted Mr. Jaggers, ‘that but for me you wouldn’t be here and couldn’t be here?’

“‘Oh, yes, sir!’ exclaimed both women together. ‘Lord bless you, sir, well we knows that!’

“‘Then why,’ said Mr. Jaggers, ‘do you come here?’

“‘My Bill, sir!’ the crying woman pleaded.

“‘Now, I tell you what!’ said Mr. Jaggers. ‘Once for all. If you don’t know that your Bill’s in good hands, I know it. And if you come here, bothering about your Bill, I’ll make an example of

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both your Bill and you, and let him slip through my fingers. Have you paid Wemmick?’

“‘Oh, yes, sir! Every farden.’”

“‘Very well. Then you have done all you have got to do. Say another word—one single word—and Wemmick shall give you your money back.’”

It is, of course, the inimitable Wemmick who has an aged parent and that delightful wooden cottage at Walworth. It is easy to recall that quaint little place with its Gothic windows and a Gothic door almost too small to allow of an entry; and a drawbridge that was a plank, crossing a chasm of four feet. Hard as nails and close as wax all day, his mind busy with the secrets of half the thieves and dangerous criminals in London, Wemmick goes home every night to “the Castle,” to fire off the toy cannon above the drawbridge, to amuse his old father, to take delight in simple healthy pleasures, to become again even as a little child. Jagers has not heard of these Arcadian delights in which his clerk indulges. Indeed, they maintain, one to the other, the sternest and most inflexible of business attitudes, and the most inscrutable secret as to their home life. One of the most telling scenes in all Dickens is that in which the grim lawyer, himself surprised into some little human feeling, learns of the other side of his clerk’s nature—that other side which all of us, more or less, keep from the gaze of a curious and prying world.

In strange contrast, indeed, to Mr. Jagers, and yet curiously resembling him in certain essentials, is that old-fashioned family solicitor, “Mr. Tulkinghorn, of the Fields,” who, throughout *Bleak House*, hugs his secrets as a miser does his gold:—

“The old gentleman is rusty to look at, but is reputed to have made good thrift out of aristocratic marriage settlements and aristocratic wills, and to be very rich. He is surrounded by a mysterious

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halo of family confidences; of which he is known to be the silent depository. There are noble Mausoleums rooted for centuries in retired glades of parks, among the growing timber and the fern, which perhaps hold fewer noble secrets than walk abroad among men, shut up in the breast of Mr. Tulkinghorn. He is of what is called the old school—a phrase generally meaning any school that seems never to have been young—and wears knee breeches tied with ribbons, and gaiters or stockings. One peculiarity of his black clothes, and of his black stockings, be they silk or worsted, is that they never shine. Mute, close, irresponsive to any glancing light, his dress is like himself. He never converses, when not professionally consulted. He is found sometimes, speechless but quite at home at corners of dinner-tables in great country houses, and near doors of drawing-rooms, concerning which the fashionable intelligence is eloquent: where everybody knows him, and where half the Peerage stops to say, ‘How do you do, Mr. Tulkinghorn?’ He receives these salutations with gravity, and buries them along with the rest of his knowledge.”

In passing, it may be pointed out that, despite this very precise description of Mr. Tulkinghorn and his knee-breeches and stockings, *Phiz*, the artist, nevertheless insisted on depicting him in trousers!

~~While Jagers' energy was volcanic and eruptive,~~ Tulkinghorn's is repressed, and becomes almost cruel in its intensity. Yet there is something wonderfully fascinating in the psychology of this man, who carries family secrets in every limb of his body and every crease of his dress. Whether his soul is devoted to the great, or whether he yields them nothing beyond the services he sells, is his personal secret. He keeps it, as he keeps

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the secrets of his clients; he is his own client in that matter, and will never betray himself. He was a solitary misanthrope with strong views on the undesirability of marriage. "My experience has taught me that most of the people I know would have been better to leave marriage alone. It is at the bottom of three-fourths of their trouble." And so we find him drinking his port in the solitude of his frescoed dining-room in Lincoln's Inn Fields.

It is in that wonderful scene, masterly portrayed, when Lady Dedlock, usually proud, beautiful and defiant, now broken and humiliated, is denied even flight by her persecutor, that we feel the latent strength and power of the inscrutable Tulkinghorn :

" . . . My jewels are all in their proper places of keeping. They will be found there. So, my dresses. So, all the valuables I have. Some ready money I had with me, please to say, but no large amount. I did not wear my own dress in order that I might avoid observation. I went, to be henceforward lost. Make this known. I leave no other charge with you.'

'Excuse me, Lady Dedlock,' says Mr. Tulkinghorn, quite unmoved. 'I am not sure that I understand you. You went——'

'To be lost to all here. I leave Chesney Wold to-night. I go this hour.'

Mr. Tulkinghorn shakes his head. She rises; but he, without moving hand from chair-back or from old-fashioned waistcoat and shirt-frill, shakes his head.

'What? Not go as I have said?'

'No, Lady Dedlock,' he very calmly replies.

'Do you know the relief that my disappearance will be? Have you forgotten the stain and blot upon this place, and where it is, and who it is?'

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‘No, Lady Dedlock, not by any means.’

Without deigning to rejoin, she moves to the inner door and has it in her hand, when he says to her, without himself stirring hand or foot, or raising his voice:

‘Lady Dedlock, have the goodness to stop and hear me, or before you reach the staircase I shall ring the alarm-bell and rouse the house. And then I must speak out before every guest and servant, every man and woman in it.’

He has conquered her. . . .”

A hard, merciless man, but one devoted wholeheartedly to his client, for it is of Sir Leicester that he is thinking. Would all his successors, we may well ask, be as obdurate in their clients’ interest, as insensible to the tragic distress of a beautiful woman? Tulkinghorn, the grave, “the high-priest of noble mysteries,” radiated severity, and severity brings a sense of power. He extracted from the adventuress, *Mdlle. Hortense*, her mistress’s secret, without one gleam of human pity; he browbeat honest *George Rouncewell* without stint; he indicted *Lady Dedlock* of her guilt, with a sleuth-hound keenness and savagery. Tulkinghorn and *Jaggers* are both in their different ways strenuous and strong men.

And the butterflies of the profession, the delicate and expensive creatures who take good care not to get blown into storms, or have their wings singed by the heat of action; who has sketched them like *Dickens*? Take, for example, “*Conversation Kenge*,” or *Mr. Vholes*, who was “a very respectable man,” not possessing a large business, and occupying a ground floor of *Symond’s Inn*, *Chancery Lane*. *Dickens* declared that the one great principle of the English law is to make business for itself. “There is no other principle,” he says, “distinctly, certainly, and consistently maintained throughout all its narrow turn-

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ings. Viewed by this light, it becomes a coherent scheme, and not the monstrous maze the laity are apt to think it. Let them but once clearly perceive that its grand principle is to make business for itself at their expense, and," he adds, "surely they will cease to grumble." Not seeing it quite plainly, or only by halves, and confusedly, the laity sometimes suffer in peace and pocket with a bad grace, and *do* grumble very much. Then it is that the respectability of men like Mr. Vholes, admired by even greater attorneys, is brought into play against them.

" ' Repeal this statute, my good sir? ' says Mr. Kenge to a smarting client, ' repeal it my dear sir? Never, with my consent. Alter this law, sir, and what will be the effect of your rash proceeding on a class of practitioners very worthily represented, allow me to say to you, by the opposite attorney in the case, Mr. Vholes? Sir, that class of practitioners would be swept from the face of the earth. Now, you cannot afford—I will say, the social system cannot afford—to lose an order of men like Mr. Vholes. Diligent, persevering, steady, acute in business. My dear sir, I understand your present feelings against the existing state of things, which I grant to be a little hard in your case; but I can never raise my voice for the demolition of a class of men like Mr. Vholes.' The respectability of Mr. Vholes has ever been cited with crushing effect before Parliamentary committees, as in the following blue minutes of a distinguished attorney's evidence. ' Question (number five hundred and seventeen thousand eight hundred and sixty-nine): If I understand you, these forms of practice indisputably occasion delay? Answer: Yes, some delay. Question: And great expense? Answer: Most assuredly they cannot be gone

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through for nothing. Question: And unspeakable vexation? Answer: I am not prepared to say that. They have never given *me* any vexation; quite the contrary. Question: But you think that their abolition would damage a class of practitioners? Answer: Yes; I would unhesitatingly mention Mr. Vholes. He would be ruined. Question: Mr. Vholes is considered, in the profession, a respectable man? Answer:—which proved fatal to the inquiry for ten years—Mr. Vholes is considered, in the profession, a *most* respectable man.' ”

Man was clearly made for the lawyers, not the lawyers for man. As Mr. Kenge, of Kenge and Carboy, observes, “This is a very great country—a very great country. Its system of equity is a very great system—a very great system.”

Dickens's early experience as a reporter helped him considerably in depicting with life-like fidelity the idiosyncrasies and in catching the style of some of the leaders of the Bar—notably, of course, Sergeant Buzfuz and Mr. Phunky, of *Pickwick*, which teems with brilliant sketches of the profession. *Pickwick*'s lawyers, delightful as they are, are, however, worn just a trifle threadbare. Buzfuz will possibly live as a caricature of the heights of audacity and over-weening vanity to which a counsel, swollen with the sense of his own importance, will ascend; whilst even to this day to designate a barrister “Mr. Skimpin” is to suggest that he habitually bullies and terrorises the unhappy simple-minded person who is unfortunate enough to appear in the witness-box.

But even if the lawyers of *Pickwick* have in the hands of bookmakers become a little trite, there is another lawyer of Dickens who has been largely ignored or neglected. I refer to Mr. Stryver in “A Tale of Two Cities.” Stryver is interesting, not only for himself and

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because he is the subject of a really remarkable piece of portraiture, but because he was based on an interesting original—the celebrated Mr. Edwin James, whom Dickens met only once, but whose every outward feature he caught and preserved in Stryver. Alas! the two lives were strangely different. A brilliant advocate, a clever actor, a distinguished Member of Parliament, James seemed to have the ball at his feet, despite the fact that he was over head and ears in debt as a result of his wild extravagance. In an evil hour he accepted a bribe in connection with a case in which he was appearing. A mercilessly analytical cross-examiner, he addressed a few mild and innocuous questions to the man who had bought comparative immunity. The Court gasped. Within a few hours almost all London knew the story. That night, in keeping with the man's striking originality, he proceeded to the House of Commons, delivered an arresting speech, and then fled to America.

There are those who allege that a cruelly ill-used and deserted wife, after a lapse of time, followed him there, and finding him once more on the high road to social success and prosperity, publicly denounced him for his crime, and that once more he had to flee. Rumour further proceeds to assert—and the truth of this is not vouched for—that Nemesis in one form or another dogged his footsteps for years, and that eventually James died, a broken-hearted disappointed man, in Australia. In any event, his story remains one of the greatest tragedies in the history of the Bar.

It was Stryver, it will be remembered, who told Sydney Carton, his "devil," that:

"I had to get into the front rank; I was not born there, was I?"

"I was not present at the ceremony, but my opinion is you were," Carton rejoined."

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So far as Carton is concerned, his fame rests, not upon his powers as advocate so much as upon that heroic act of self-sacrifice which he made upon the scaffold in France. He is one of Dickens's best creations, nevertheless, for he fascinates the imagination from the moment when one meets him, ill-dressed and debauched, to his supreme moment of immolation and tragic glory.

One of the cleverest sidelights that Dickens's genius ever flashed upon the law was that masterly example of an unscrupulous cross-examination, when poor Kit is on trial, in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and Swiveller is in the box trying to save him. The notorious Sampson Brass, one of the most unmitigated scoundrels in the whole gallery of Dickens's criminals, although "a gentleman by Act of Parliament," and "a solicitor of the High Court of Chancery," has sought to ruin and disgrace Kit by placing a banknote in the hat of the boy, and then charging him with theft. The jaunty Dick Swiveller is asked:—

"Where did you dine yesterday—was it near here, sir?"

'Oh, to be sure—yes—just over the way. . . .'

'Alone, sir?'

'I beg your pardon,' says Mr. Swiveller, who has not caught the question.

'Alone, sir?' repeated Mr Brass's gentleman, in a voice of thunder. 'Did you dine alone? Did you treat anybody, sir? Come!'

'Oh, yes, to be sure—yes, I did,' says Mr. Swiveller, with a smile.

'Have the goodness to banish a levity, sir, which is very ill-suited to the place in which you stand (though perhaps you have reason to be thankful that it's only that place),' says Mr. Brass's gentleman, with a nod of the head, insinuating that the dock

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is Mr. Swiveller's legitimate sphere of action, 'and attend to me. You were waiting about here yesterday in expectation that this trial was coming on. You dined over the way. You treated somebody. Now was that somebody brother to the prisoner at the bar?'

Mr. Swiveller is proceeding to explain——

'Yes or no, sir,' cries Mr. Brass's gentleman.

'But you will allow me——'

'Yes or no, sir.'

'Yes, it was; but——'

'Yes, it was,' cries the gentleman, taking him up short, 'and a very pretty witness *you* are!'

Down sits Mr. Brass's gentleman. Kit's gentleman, not knowing how far the matter really stands, is afraid to pursue the subject, Richard Swiveller retires abashed. Judge, jury, and spectators have visions of his lounging about with an ill-looking, large whiskered, dissolute young fellow of six feet high. The reality is, little Jacob, with the calves of his legs exposed to the open air, and himself tied up in a shawl''

Though only a minor point, it has often occurred to the writer whether Dickens, in his laudable satire, has not fallen into a slight error. Dick Swiveller was called as a witness for the prosecution; surely Mr. Brass's gentleman would hardly be allowed to cross-examine his own witness! Mr. Witherden should have seen to this, but then Mr. Witherden is one of the most shadowy of the Dickensian lawyers, and the only important thing that can be placed to his credit is that he proved himself largely instrumental in ultimately securing the downfall of Sampson Brass.

Uriah Heep and Brass have, as characters, much in common, but the former is immortalised less as a lawyer

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than as a loathsome hypocrite, the symbol of all that is revolting in oily deceit, fawning treachery, and criminal craftiness; and as such, he is dealt with in another chapter. Brass's sister Sally deserves a passing word of mention. She is delineated for us in strong lines—a kind of Amazon at common law. "In mind she was of a strong and vigorous turn, having from her earliest youth devoted herself with uncommon ardour to the study of the law; not wasting her speculations upon its eagle flights, which are rare, but tracing it attentively through all the slippery and eel-like crawlings in which it commonly pursues its way." Of the Brass combination, Sally was the more villainous of the pair. An unsexed woman, there was more cunning unrelieved in her nature than even in that of her unspeakable brother. And yet it should be remembered that when this disreputable attorney with his cringing manner and his very harsh voice, was eventually brought to justice and ruined, it was his sister who was also seen "in the obscene hiding-places in London: in archways, dark vaults, and cellars."

The most astonishing feature of those who are real lawyers in Dickensian fiction, is their marked modernity. Nearly all of them may be met to-day in their selected haunts. Perker, for instance, to whom reference has already been made—"the little high-dried man, with a dark, squeezed-up face and small restless black eyes that kept winking and twinkling on each side of his inquisitive nose, as if they were playing a perpetual game of peep-bo with that feature"—he may be found in our twentieth-century "Bear Garden" on any morning. Then that "young man of the name of Guppy" and his friend Jobling—they may be seen lunching together in a certain little restaurant in the Strand, or opposite the Law Courts, on any day next week. One recalls that sprightly conversation with Jobling, who has been "up

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against luck," accepts Guppy's invitation to lunch—their implicit trust to "things coming round." That same philosophy, or lunatic optimism, or something akin to it, can always be heard within the precincts of the Courts. And within the Court itself Buzfuz is hard at it, and there, too, is Snubbin's satirical smile. And below, on the front bench, under counsel, the observant may still see the manœuvrings of eminently astute practitioners, of whom Messrs. Dodson and Fogg are excellent prototypes.

Lincoln's Inn still possesses its Snubbin under another pseudonym; there are still firms which would answer to the name of "Kenge and Carboy," whose senior partner was a gentleman "who appeared to enjoy beyond everything the sound of his own voice," by reason of the fact that "it was mellow and full and gave great importance to every word he uttered." Around Bloomsbury to-day can be seen the exact double of Mortimer Lightwood—adroit, respectable, honest, but with a decided *penchant* for unravelling mysteries. Certain, too, it is, that within the heart of the City of London the reader can this day be ushered into the office of a very up-to-date type of Mr. Tangle, who knows more about a particular case than anyone else living, including the contestants to that case themselves, and who in ten minutes will have created an impression of having never read anything else but the facts in connection with it since he left school. Equally well a visit might be paid to a present-day Mr. Fips, the soul of discretion, prepared always on his clients' behalf to do good by stealth, and who would blush to find it fame. On the other hand, it will not be a libel on a complex and highly variegated profession if it is declared that it is quite possible to discover a modern Samuel Briggs, who, it will be remembered, was described in the *Sketches* as a mere machine—"a sort of

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self-acting legal walking-stick." Similarly, no one would dispute the fact that it would not be difficult to provide the living counter-part of young, smart, and even "spoffish" Mr. Percy Noakes, whose sitting-room always presented a strange confusion of dress-gloves, boxing-gloves, caricatures, albums, invitation-cards, and cricket bats.

Let the man who still doubts the modernity of Dickens's lawyers answer this: Has no other town than Canterbury to-day a Mr. Wickfield who, excellent in his intentions and care of other people's concerns, has yet permitted himself to be brought to the verge of ruin by the falsifications and malpractices of a chief clerk or a junior partner? Has Mr. Joseph Overton, solicitor, ceased to be Mayor of Great Winglebury, and has his namesake, Mr. Owen Overton, also a solicitor, relinquished his position as Chief Magistrate to the community in which stands a "St. James's Arms"?

It would, of course, be preposterous for anyone to admit that at one time or another has been pointed out a sacrosanct "Mr. Spiker," who in whispered awe, has been named as "solicitor to somebody or something remotely connected with the Treasury!"

It is maintained, however, that we still have the type of firm answering to Spenlow and Jorkins, although they may not be nowadays proctors in Doctors' Commons. Spenlow still uses Jorkins's name when anything unpleasant is to be done, and Jorkins, in the background, is still made to appear the most obdurate and ruthless of men. Dickens's Jorkins was "a mild man of heavy temperament. . . . If a clerk wanted his salary raised, Mr. Jorkins wouldn't listen to such a proposition. If a client were slow to settle his bill of costs, Mr. Jorkins was resolved to have it paid; and however painful these things might be (and always were) to the feelings of Mr. Spenlow, Mr. Jorkins would have his bond."

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Surely many people can add, as did Dickens, that they have had experience of other houses doing business on the principle of this enterprising firm!

Take a final example of those lawyers who have been reproducing themselves in our age—Snitchey and Craggs. The description of their office has always held a peculiar interest, for, although it is old-world in all its suggestiveness, there is something essentially up-to-date in the raciness of the methods employed within. Here is the picture:—

“Snitchey and Craggs had a snug little office on the old Battle Ground, where they drove a snug little business and fought a great many small pitched battles for a great many contending parties. Though it could hardly be said of these conflicts that they were running fights—for in truth they generally proceeded at a snail’s pace—the part the firm had in them came so far within the general denomination, that now they took a shot at this plaintiff, and now aimed a chop at that defendant, now made a heavy charge at an estate in Chancery, and now had some light skirmishing among an irregular body of small debtors, just as the occasion served, and the enemy happened to present himself. The Gazette was an important and profitable feature in some of their fields, as in fields of greater renown; and in most of the actions wherein they showed their generalship, it was afterwards observed by the combatants that they had had great difficulty in making each other out, or in knowing with any degree of distinctness what they were about, in consequence of the vast amount of smoke by which they were surrounded.

“The offices of Messrs. Snitchey and Craggs stood convenient, with an open door down two smooth

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steps, in the market-place; so that any angry farmer inclining towards hot water might tumble into it at once. Their special council chamber and hall of conference was an old back room upstairs, with a low dark ceiling, which seemed to be knitting its brows gloomily in the consideration of tangled points of law. It was furnished with some high backed leathern chairs, garnished with great goggle-eyed brass nails, of which, every here and there, two or three had fallen out, or had been picked out, perhaps, by the wandering thumbs and forefingers of bewildered clients. There was a framed print of a great judge in it, every curl in whose dreadful wig had made a man's hair stand on end. Bales of papers filled the dusty closets, shelves, and tables, and round the wainscot there were tiers of boxes, padlocked and fireproof, with people's names painted outside, which anxious visitors felt themselves, by a cruel enchantment, obliged to spell backwards and forwards, and to make anagrams of while they sat, seeming to listen to Snitchey and Craggs, without comprehending one word of what they said.

“ In this office, nevertheless, Snitchey and Craggs made honey for their several hives. Here, sometimes, they would linger, of a fine evening, at the window of their council-chamber overlooking the old battle ground, and wonder (but that was generally at assize time, when much business had made them sentimental) at the folly of mankind, who couldn't always be at peace with one another and go to law comfortably.”

One at least of Dickens's legal creations has passed definitely into the limbo of the past. He has no modern counterpart, and his like will never be seen again: he is the engaging, if untidy and somewhat disreputable, Solomon

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Pell, that astute and Bohemian practitioner at the Insolvent Debtor's Court, who, it will be recalled, obliged the Wellers by getting Sam imprisoned for money borrowed for the express purpose from Mr. Weller, senr., so that Sam might share his master's experience in Fleet Prison. Forster relates that when Dickens conceived this idea of making Sam share the discomforts of his gaol-life with Pickwick, he probably had in mind his favourite Smollett, and how, when Peregrine Pickle was lodged in the Fleet, both Hatchway and Pipes refused to leave him. Be that as it may, it is known that the details of the arrangements between the Wellers and Solomon Pell were adjusted in the little public-house opposite the Court in Portugal Street. Having no fixed office himself, it was here that Mr. Pell's clients usually took him, and here he was wont to be found, regaling himself with an Abernethy biscuit and a saveloy. It was in this same public-house that Mr. Weller, junr., delighted the company with a song on the bold Turpin, which another coach-driver who was present insisted was "derogatory to the cloth."

The lower branch of the legal profession has become far too dignified nowadays to indulge in any of the freemasonry which Pell, in his careless, slovenly but good-natured way, exhibited to those for whom he acted, but has it gained in efficiency as in dignity? The modern Solomon Pell is on the telephone, keeps a staff of clerks and typists, and maybe he knows a good deal less of the business he is transacting than his forbears in those genial, far-off, happy times.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ECCENTRICS.

“It is something to look upon enjoyment so that it be free and wild and in the face of nature, though it is but the enjoyment of an idiot. It is something to know that Heaven has left the capacity of gladness in such a creature’s breast; it is something to be assured that however lightly men may crush that faculty in their fellows, the Great Creator of mankind imparts it even to his despised and slighted work. Who would not rather see a poor idiot happy in the sunlight than a wise man pining in a darkened gaol?”

Barnaby Rudge. Chap. XXV.

THE earlier days of Dickens were the days of thrilling realisms in eccentric, monstrous, and *courbé* human nature. Asylums, prisons, and workhouses were not yet wholly reformed and systematised. The humanitarian spirit was in its adolescence; the ragged remnants and the distortions of poor broken humanity still walked more freely at large. It was the day of *Valentine Vox* when the cruelties and inadequacies of private asylums were impeached; it was the day of Scott, when Madge Wildfires still roamed the countryside and lurked in the slums of the towns, like Peter the Wild Boy.

Stories of lunatics, criminals, freaks, monstrosities, and eccentrics, bulked large in literature. Fantastic and pseudo-authentic biographies of all phases of abnormal and aberrated humanity passed out of print into the mouths of the vulgar and became orally current. The popular imagination—at all events among the lower classes—revelled in such themes: they were the “thrills” of the period. The lingering features of the bad old times of the eighteenth century had not yet been wiped off the face of a civilisation tardily moving towards better

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things: human nature still made strange divarications from the normal, both on the moral and the physical planes.

There was little or no explanation of these departures into the realm of the freakish, the demented, the disordered, the monstrous, the hyper-criminal. The atmosphere was largely one of superstitious curiosity, morbid wonder, and *malade imaginaire*. From mediæval times anecdotal literature and prints of these out-of-the-way phases and singularities of humanity had been handed down. They were added to in transit until they became a feature of the travelling shows and assisted to transform the old mediæval fairs into the familiar modern fêtes of vulgarity which are still the showman's paradise.

We can well imagine Charles Dickens seizing hold of these old-time curiosities of literature, freaks of biography, and annals of crime, and, with the instinct of the humanitarian observer, looking out for concrete specimens. Sir Walter Scott did so. He wrote a work on witches and witch-craft in which much of the episode and phenomena of this character was referable to wandering lunatics and fantastics. Here and there in his novels are strange creations which they undoubtedly suggested. Some of the older generation may still remember the literary atmosphere surcharged as it was with this element. The chronicles of crime teemed with characters like Moll Cut-Purse, an infamous compound of pick-pocket, prostitute, and procuress—a female Jonathan Wild of the reign of Charles I., who died aged seventy-five. James Maclean, the prototype of the calculating and cold-blooded murderer, Peace; Jonathan Wild; Jack Sheppard; and James Witney, the dashing and criminal highwayman;—these are familiar instances. There were also some almost unthinkable murderers, of

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whom one, Sam Morley, like the modern Sheward of Norwich, killed, cut up, and actually ate parts of his victim! And so forth.

In these records, counterparts of such persons as Quilp, Richard III., and Chops the Dwarf, were common. All sorts of misbegotten and curvated specimens of men and women are collated. We have Royal Court dwarfs like Richard Gibson and Anne Shepherd, who evoked the muse of Waller, the poet. Owen Farrel, of whom Quilp was a remarkable physical replica, was reputed to be so hideously ugly that, according to the description of Caulfield, "Children were frightened, and dogs snarled at him as he passed them in the street"—reminding us of the soliloquy of Richard III. upon his own infirmities of frame. Joseph Clark was said to be "a posture master of Pall Mall," who voluntarily exhibited every species of deformity and dislocation, so that even Molins, the famous surgeon, was shocked at the sight. Then there was one Cornelius Caton, a whimsical, dwarf publican, who kept the "White Lion," of Richmond, in the reign of George II., and became notorious and prosperous after the manner of fat bar-women of modern London. Freak women were there galore, like Hannah Snell and La Maupin, romantic and indecorous creatures, who were notorious for their assumption of male attire and their masculine delinquencies (reminding us somewhat of the theory that Datchery was Helena Landless in masquerade). One, Sarah Mapp, figures amongst the records of remarkable quacks as a female bone-setter of frightful ugliness and repulsive masculinity: she died in Seven Dials in 1736 in great poverty and distress after a career of considerable notoriety. Travelling witch-finders, tramping poets, and lexicographers, living skeletons, giants, mountebanks, and animal trainers, add to the motley annals of this eccentric crew of these bad old

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days. Misers there were in numbers; some, like John Elwes and Thomas Guy, mingled curiously perverted meannesses with public philanthropy. Street and parish characters were innumerable: like "Old Harry," a cabinet or raree showman of the eighteenth century, the forerunner of the modern boys' box-show of coloured pictures and figures, and the gallanty theatre; "Old Boots," a Sam Weller of contorted features, whose oddities excited amusement at an Inn in Ripon, Yorkshire; John Gate, a deaf mute, who always rode by permit of public approval and official sanction on the cope or tail of the death-cart to every execution at Tyburn, smoking his pipe with the utmost serenity, this being his one royal pleasure and outing for the week!

From what we know of Dickens it is only natural to assume that he was fully acquainted with the records and literature of these types of perverted, diseased, and twisted humanity. Doubtless he pondered painfully upon the conditions of crime, degradation, poverty, and ignorance, which produced the specimens of his own day. Evidence of this may be seen in the *Miscellaneous Papers*. The "Threatening Letter to Thomas Hood," originally published in *Hood's Magazine and Comic Miscellany* in 1844, is neither more nor less than a satire by Charles Dickens on the vulgar interest in monstrosities at the time when "General" Tom Thumb was received at the Court of Queen Victoria. After that it was satirically prophesied by Dickens that the Constitution would, "nautically speaking," gradually go down, and the human species in England develop a tendency to become reduced to a mingled race of savages and pigmies. For a quick way to get received at Court or securing Court favour was obvious. People were already keeping their infant children down—not down in their numbers or their precocity, "but down in their growth, sir!" A

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destructive and subduing drink, compounded of gin and milk in equal quantities, such as is given to puppies to retard their growth, was being contemplated. "Not something short, but something shortening!" The gin-and-milk theory of dwarfism appeared in *Nicholas Nickleby*. In Crummles' theatrical company the "Infant Phenomenon" was *the* great asset, and gin and milk *the* specific for preserving her business and physical values! The whole of this Tom Thumb "letter" is a satire in Dickens's humourous vein, with just a "bite" of Swift, perhaps, in such references as were made to Mr. Barnum's collection of monstrosities as affording literary inspiration for a new novel by Hood himself!

It was not a long time previous to this that Dickens gave evidence of his tremendous literary energies in the editing of Joseph Grimaldi's "Memoirs"; and in a subsequent article in the *Examiner* one may see animadversions upon "Court Ceremonies," in which the office of the Lord Chamberlain is referred to as "the last stronghold of an enormous amount of tomfoolery, which is infinitely better done upon the stage in *Tom Thumb*." Several studies of remarkable murders and matters associated with crime are amongst these articles of Dickens, all showing that his *penchant* for the eccentric was a reflection of his time, and that he had determinedly set himself the task of reforming the public taste and of directing the public intention to grapple intelligently the evils associated with all such physical and moral aberrations of mankind.

For this reason it should be both useful and interesting to study the element of eccentricity—so distinctive of Dickens's humour, so characteristic also of his pathos and humanity—especially as it relates to his characterisation and the moral purposes of his life.

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The element of eccentricity in Dickens's humorous characters varied throughout the whole range of his many hundreds of minor and major portraits; but, in the broad sense, it may be made so elastic as to apply to all of them in varying degree. It has been charged against Dickens as a fault, and a mannerism, that he always gave point and prominence to some specific singularity, and thus limited both his art and the quality of his humour. This criticism might be true of portraits here and there, but it certainly is not true of most.

This habit of emphasising some odd singularity, gesture, gait, accent, language, or what not, is not a fault at all. It is common knowledge that we are all marked by some peculiarity, and are also conscious of some peculiarity in others. The child distinguishes between one daisy and another. We all know how some slight and obscure mannerism, or some peculiarity of character, will at once endear an adult to a child, or repel. As between grown-ups, how frequently is it the case that a single feature of character or a single point of personality becomes the slender bond of attachment or the slight pivot of repulsion! We all share in different degrees a penetrative insight into minor or obscure particularities, and Dickens possessed this power from childhood in a highly marked degree. It is not surprising, therefore, that all the odd, whimsical, or eccentric facets of human character, which he so quickly assimilated, should be given off again in his portraiture, sparkling with the glint of his inimitable humour, and the lustre of his glowing genius.

Such prominences of eccentricity are never confined to one class. No one can say that Mr. Micawber's peculiarities were confined to his style of letter-writing or the brewing of punch: these were perhaps the most pronounced and the most repetitive; but they were the

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media, often, of conveying his generally buoyant and effusive nature. The freakish memory of Mrs. Nickleby was but a point, and a marked and significant point, in the presentation of a distinctive and a well-drawn portrait. Mrs. Gummidge's repetitions of her lone and forlorn condition, are obviously and designedly given in order to bring into sharp contrast the unvarying patience and nobility of character of her protector, Daniel Peggotty. Mr. Boythorn's persistent roaring in the character of a meek lamb or a sucking dove, bores some of us just as much as it did Gissing; but his talk has interesting features, and his whole character possesses quite feasible congruity. Silas Wegg's wooden character and wooden leg are boredom to many people, considered either as eccentricity or humour; but for me he makes a perfect piece of comic portraiture carved out of knotted and twisted material, with the craft and thrifty resources of a German toy-maker. Captain Cuttle, with his eccentric. pot-hook vocables, and his hooked hand, gives off many sea-going phrases. But they are just the true expression of a rugged and simple mind, labouring with rising feelings or sentiments, and only a limited vocabulary wherewith to bring them to the surface of articulation. Then, too, the sheer featureless character of the wordless bulk-head Bunsby, is conveyed with exquisite art by just one eccentricity, namely, his expressionless, yet expressive, reserve. Each time we see the whole of him (and there is a lot of him) in this single eccentric touch.

It is the same with Mantalini and his constant "demnition" epithets, and his "going to the demnition bows," and with Traddles and his upstanding hair, and his ubiquitous skeletons (out of which latter, by the way, Mr. G. K. Chesterton constructs the whole philosophy of Traddles's character). It is the same with the wheezy,

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breezy Major Bagstock, with his protrusive blue, wooden features, his apoplectic cocksureness, his blatant vanities, and his monotonies of speech. It is similarly so in the case of Toots, with his few stock phrases, his shy, sheepish manner, and his invertebrate love-making. While to some readers these isolated chips and chards of characterisation become stale and flat, to others they are revelations of an expansive and a distinctive inner nature. Mr. Chesterton devotes many pages to a luminous and convincing exposition of Toots, as one of the marvels of Dickens's powers of creative art in the eccentric or grotesque.

But while these phases of the eccentric are dependent for their effect upon the receptivity of the reader, there is no mistaking their power or their import in their more amplified form as whole personages. These exaggerated singularities are part of a deliberate method and a specific design by which Dickens desired to convey truths of life and character. And in laying some stress upon them as "germinal points," so to speak, of a main principle of the Dickensian art, it is only with the object of showing their affinity to the same thing in a more extended way. This quality of the fantastic or eccentric is seen in many characters as a whole: it is presented to us in the form of eccentricities of body, as well as in aberrations of mind. Quilp and Miss Mowcher are familiar instances of the one, and represent the extremity in that particular direction. The idiot, Mr. Dick, the fantastic and half-witted Barnaby Rudge, and the demented Miss Havisham and the lunatic gentleman in small clothes, represent the extremes of eccentricity upon the mental plane. Between each of these sets of aberrated humanity there are many gradations.

We are well acquainted with Dickens's peculiar trick and capacity for investing a character with interest by

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the revelation of some physical defect. The poor deaf and dumb waif, a girl picked up by Marigold, the strolling auctioneer or cheap-jack, is one. As a result of the care and education he bestowed upon her, she literally glowed with graces of pure womanhood and filial affection. Bertha Plummer, the blind daughter of Caleb, the toy-maker, developed a wonderfully sweet nature in a subjective world of beauty cultivated for her delight by her struggling parent. Then there is old Stagg, the blind villain, a monstrosity of sly criminal craftiness and thievery, and the one-eyed Bagman, who is the narrator of two stories in the *Pickwick Papers*. Weakness in legs is represented by Mr. Joseph Tuggs, Simon Tappertit, Uncle Feenix, and Muzzle, the footman. Excessive obesity finds victims in Mrs. Taunton and the Fat Boy of *Pickwick*—the former a good-looking widow of fifty, with the form of a giantess and the mind of a child. In the dwarfish or stunted characters we have already noticed Chops, Quilp, Miss Mowcher, the Infant Phenomenon, the elfin Young Smallweed, and the precocious and pathetic doll's dressmaker, Jenny Wren. In mental singularity, we may give numerous instances of Dickens's departure into the region of the eccentric.

We pause for the moment to mention the repressed phases of intellect, so strikingly hit off in boy-characters like Poor Jo and Sloppy. These are amongst many types of neglected children, the moral of which has been pointed out elsewhere. Dickens could portray the precocious as well as the impercipient mind, and could render the portrait equally true and convincing; instance the boy "Bailey Junior," and Fanny Cleaver. Dickens, without doubt, had a commanding acquaintance with the psychology of the child-mind, and this phase of his genius is well seen in some of the "eccentrics" with whom it will be necessary to deal. In mental

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oddities we at once recall the poor half-witted Miss Flite, of Court of Chancery fame, a type of mind deflected from the normal by the iniquities of Chancery law mazes. Another remarkable portrait of more extreme dementia is that of Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations*. Although an enlarged or exaggerated portrait, it becomes more or less typical of numerous sad cases where the soul of natural and promising womanhood may suffer embitterment and become warped and twisted into ghastly shapes by blighted hopes. As in the case of Rosa Dartle, the iron and rust of revengeful feelings, once permitted to make an entry, surcharge with malignant passions, subjugate all joy and diffuse chronic misery. Miss Havisham's disgust of her false lover is allowed to grow into a feverish fury against the male sex. She becomes an impressive and almost ghastly picture of the degeneration of the female soul, impotently endeavouring to foment a universal sex antagonism. She remains to this day a monument to the power of Dickens to penetrate the inmost involutions of feminine rage.

Mrs. Nickleby's eccentricity of mind exhibited a peculiar freakishness and weakness of memory, and a curious inaccuracy and irrelevancy in conversation: her counterpart, in some degree, is vividly portrayed in *Diplomacy*. It was Mr. G. B. Shaw who said that amongst other things the certain way to startle the world was to stick close to the methods of Molière and take characters bodily out of Dickens. Portrayers of human character who possess so great a range as Sardou, Dickens, and Molière, may well be expected to fall perchance into parallelisms. Nobody imagines that Dickens copied Tartuffe in Pecksniff, or that Carker was suggested by Iago, or Quilp by Richard III., or Jasper by Macbeth. Nevertheless, the brilliant compatriot of Molière has certainly succeeded in reproducing in Lady Henry Fairfax the

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replica of Mrs. Nickleby in many respects. Both are charming, gracious, and tolerant conversationalists. Both are amusingly loquacious and refreshingly reminiscent. Both are affectionate mothers, and please us with the pride they evince in their offspring. Both evoke in us a tender, if artificial, interest in their general discursiveness and irrelevancy of conversation. Both are well-meaning and genteel. Both convey a delicate emphasis of social status implicit in their talk. Both have a certain amusing invalidity of memory and manner. Both are amusingly inconsequent and quaintly unconscious of the topic of the moment. Both talk, with sweet complacence, like elderly *poupées*, whose internal mechanism is set to run down willy-nilly. Both are serenely self-satisfied as having said and done quite the right thing, nevertheless always deflected into eccentricity. Both lack the slightest grasp of domestic or other affairs of the present, and pass a large part of their existence alternating in an atmosphere of reminiscence with contemporary vacuity. Both command our tender sufferance from the very display of their dainty, unaffected weaknesses and ineptitudes.

But there the comparison ends. Mrs. Nickleby's eccentric vacancy of mind leads her into one of those exquisitely humorous episodes which only Dickens can create. This particular *contretemps* is in the shape of a droll affair of love which shows Dickens to be altogether a great artist in the delineation of eccentricities of intellect. It is Mrs. Nickleby's affinity of soul with the lunatic gentleman in the small clothes which undoubtedly bring her to this curious pass! It is, indeed, the culminating phenomenon of her own *bizarrierie*. This comical affair ends happily, however, with the intervention of her friends. It is to be noted, nevertheless, that these eccentricities of Mrs. Nickleby's nature do not

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lessen our liking for her. Despite the weaknesses of her character, her personality is not an unattractive one. She may be foolish, but she is not silly—that is, in the sense that her follies disgust us. She is so placed in a setting of humour that we are tolerantly amused and forgive freely all her foibles, for they belong, after all, to naïve and amiable childhood rather than to stupid womanhood. Moreover, like Lady Henry Fairfax in *Diplomacy*, she conveys a truth worth contemplating. Both are personalities which delight us because they are so pleasantly unaffected by the world's troubles and perturbations. Whilst people about them are concerned and disturbed with the rigid consistencies, the conformities and conflicts of life, to them relevancy is nothing, resentments are non-existent, anxieties and troubles are largely a pleasant memory. In fact, they are dominated by a fairy-like haze of reminiscence. It colours every mood and tense of their beings, brings constantly a serene and simple joy, and supplants entirely the atmosphere of the disturbing present. This, too, is a prominent and agreeable feature of the portraits of Mr. Dick and Barnaby Rudge, with the difference that their vacancy of mind was congenital and constant.

There are readers of Dickens imbued with the notion that Mrs. Nickleby is a fool, and was intended to be simply an amiable portrait of one. If she be a fool she has the enviable wisdom and capacity that all mankind does not possess: the power to summon up the past as a world of bright spirits and gay experiences. It is the privilege of age to feast on memory, and derive delectable sustenance for the mental being of the present. Mrs. Nickleby represents the sublime fact that the sharp thorns and brambles of experience do not necessarily enter into the remembrance. It is the recollection of the best and happiest in our lives which generally remains with us,

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while the memory of the pains of adversity and the trials of effort falls into the limbo of forgetfulness, or becomes powerless to assail our present joy. It is the retrospect of accomplishment and attainment which tenaciously stays with us, and it is thus that reminiscence becomes a gay debauch for age. Mrs. Nickleby's weakness of mind was of this involuntary character, as, fortunately for weak souls, is generally the case. It was so with Mr. Dick and Barnaby Rudge.

The point of these reflections is that the genius of Dickens never fails to impress us, upon close analysis. To portray character through the medium of humour, and to depict its extremes of eccentricity without plunging over the precipice of the ridiculous and the silly, is a notable achievement; and to leave solid and gracious reflections upon the motive and purpose of it all, is surely the hall-mark of superlative genius.

Dickens appears to have been specially addicted to delineations of perverted or eccentric tendency in females; and we suspect that this was the inevitable outcome of his pathetic regard for all women who somehow or other had missed their rôle of normal natural and happy womanhood. Miss Tox, for example, is a patho-humorous example. Beneath her long lean figure, and her faded air, and her spasmodic gestures, we discern the gentlewoman who has been deprived of something vital to a robustly happy life. We perceive the weariness of a soul which has adopted the severities of a self-repressed and loveless life. We deduce the fact that Mr. Dombey is the point and pivot of it all; he whom, in her winter palace of window-flowers, is pensively connected with her "summer days and dandelion fetters." Happier and more contented are the two little perky, bird-like, maiden sisters, the Misses Spenlow, with their knowing and eccentric little notions of the Temple of Love,

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whose distant portals had never opened to their naïve imagination.

Miss Pross, again, is one, beneath whose eccentricities lies a warm and faithful heart. A grim, wild-looking woman, with brawny arms and an abrupt manner, she sacrifices herself to her master and young mistress, Lucie Manette, and maims her faculties in that dramatic personal encounter with Madame Defarge, the French revolutionist. In the dark abyss of this dire disturbance, the story of the demented Dr. Manette makes another striking study in psychological singularity. Himself a physician, he was silently spirited away, and was confined to the Bastille because he had become acquainted with certain crimes of a hated family of the nobility. Confined for many years by a chain in the narrowest of cells, he was discovered by his friends in a garret making shoes, still, however, in the hands of the friendly revolutionists. The picture of the mental and physical wreck, which infamous wrong and prolonged suffering had accomplished, when his daughter Lucie is brought to him, is that of a master hand. It sustains the mind in the most intense emotion of pity; it wrings the heart. Not merely is the outward form of the broken man seen, but the poor emaciated soul is revealed as if still in the ghostly atmosphere of an undeserved purgatory. We are breathless with awe, and a choking grief assails us. With the memory gone and mind defeated, Dr. Manette seems but to exist in the final stage of human endurance. Each faculty is worn and defecated to the same condition of transparency as are his poor hands. Physically and mentally, he is the mere apparition of his former self, brought by suffering to the verge of inaction and inanity. And there he sits, making shoes: the sole pivotal point upon which hangs the slender and attenuated remnants of his life.

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To present all this, the artist resorts to no psychological analysis or description. It is given in the vivid lights and shades of externalisms, and the stricken grief of Lucie's appeal to what remains in the arid depths of her father's memory and feeling; an appeal of love which may perchance light up the darkened and mysterious recesses of his mind, moving him to recollections of the past, and to a proper sense of his personal identity. The story of the slow recovery of the Doctor, and his temporary relapse, we all remember. It is recalled only to show how the genius of Dickens was equal to the portrayal of mental abnormality with unsurpassable dramatic effect.

As another illustration, take the character of Mr. Dick in *David Copperfield*. This is an instance in which high moral purpose as well as the gift of portraiture are equally impressive. The story was published in 1849-50. It was a period when lunatics were too frequently made the victims of cruelty and wrong, both by their relations and asylum authorities. The eccentric, rather austere, but true-hearted woman, Miss Betsey Trotwood, set herself to thwart relatives who had wronged this harmless imbecile. She took him under her own protection; and her management of him is, by itself, an interesting and telling feature of the story. She persists in treating him as if he were of perfectly sound mind, and there is a strong mutual regard and affection between them. The place and importance of Mr. Richard Babley (his right name), unfolds as the plot proceeds. A curious and amusing significance blends with all his doings: he has a mechanical gift for making enormous kites, and a boy's own joy in flying them. He is also concerned in memorialising the Lord Chancellor as to his own personal history, and he has been doing this for ten years. In the eyes of Aunt Betsey, the single defect of these memorialisings

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is the persistent and ludicrously inconsequent reference to the head of Charles the First. (How often in our self-absorption do we all get something akin to the Head of Charles the First, in the history of our own real or supposed wrongs!) Mr. Dick, therefore, determines, despite his repeated failures for ten years, to please his revered protector. The family enter into the sport of the make-up of his kite—made up as it is of his memorialisings—and the fond record of his wrongs soars away into the blue skies over the Dover Cliffs, and leaves him joyous! Love and self-forgetfulness bring true happiness. Who but Dickens could extract humour and high moral purpose out of such eccentric and simple cryptics?

The bond of regard and esteem between these two, Mr. Dick and Aunt Betsey, is reminiscent of one illuminating lesson from Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*. Our real, our true and our higher self, is born in the minds of those we love. Solveig is the "mother" of Peer Gynt's real self, and he exists in her faith, hope, and love.

"I will cradle thee, I will watch thee;
Sleep and dream thou, dear my boy!"

Truly a great and unique "king-thought"; one of many for which Ibsen lived, and one infinitely capable of reforming the world. The secret of Aunt Betsey's success in making Mr. Dick a happy, and even a useful human being, despite his affliction, lies in this link of mutual affection expressed in simple domestic terms of felicity. It is implicit rather than explicit in all Dickens's descriptions of their homely intercourse; but the effect upon both is manifest. It softens the austerities and angularities of Aunt Betsey sufficiently to permit of her taking to her heart and home the poor waif, David Copperfield. She has Mr. Dick's advice and authority for so serious a change in her domestic affairs! Henceforth there grows up a new love and a new interest within her: it lifts her above the wrongs and adversities of

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her own past, and changes her somewhat acid and crabbed nature into a splendid example of true womanhood. It enables her, too, to face with fortitude a crisis both in her life and in the professional education of David.

As for Mr. Dick, the trouble in the Head of Charles the First, which has somehow got into his own, is made to evaporate in a child-like delight in life: he is grey-headed, but the years fill him with the sunshine of laughter and the warmth of delight. He has the child-nature, which Dickens can so well portray: his interest in games and his gifts of mechanism are intensely boyish. His veneration for Aunt Betsey is child-like in its simple sincerity, and is identical with his eccentric reverence for the philological scholarship of Dr. Strong. That learned man has an unsophisticated side to his nature which attracts him to the boyish Mr. Dick; and the latter's delight at being "noticed" is all strongly redolent of Dickens's attitude towards the general subject of the treatment and interpretation of childhood. This strange friendship becomes, for the Doctor, the means of a self-revelation with regard to his own position with his young wife; and the significance of Mr. Dick in the narrative, culminates in his share and influence in effecting a complete reconciliation between them, and placing their attachment upon a renewed and a happier footing. Such is the power and potency of "childishness" in the eccentric, when rightly treated and wisely controlled.

The portrait of Maggy, in *Little Dorrit*, is no less convincing, both in its skill of delineation and the obviousness of its motive. The physical description of this poor idiot seems to accord with the disease known to the medical faculty as acromegaly, in which there is marked enlargement of the bones, of the features, the hands, and the feet, with a dull, stupid, and almost animal appearance. Dickens had doubtless seen a speci-

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men of this form of abnormality, and describes it with almost pathological accuracy. “-She was about eight and “twenty, with large bones, large features, large hands “and feet, large eyes, and no hair.” The picture of the young and diminutive Little Dorrit mothering this gawky, fumbling, querulous, floundering, unteachable piece of poor humanity would be almost ridiculous, but for the many skilful little traits of mind which soften our repugnance and gradually warm us into sympathetic interest in this somewhat mismatched female friendship. “Her large eyes were limpid and almost colourless: “they seem to be very little affected by light, and to “stand unnaturally still. There was also that attentive “listening expression in her face, which is seen in the “faces of the blind; but she was not blind, having one “tolerably serviceable eye. Her face was not exceed- “ingly ugly, though it was only redeemed from being so “by a smile; a good-humoured smile, and pleasant in “itself, but rendered pitiable by being constantly there.”

Little Dorrit had impressed her with the fixed idea that she was ten years old and would never be more, however long she lived. Like Peter Pan she never did grow up, but nevertheless lived as happily and as usefully as her pathetic and abnormal nature permitted. She had a voracious appetite for stories, and “Little Mother,” as Maggy affectionately called her, used them to light up her atrophied powers of imagination and shape her palsied child-mind into some sense of self-respect and self-control and usefulness.

The character of Barnaby Rudge is presented to us with the same idea of developing and appealing to the child-nature in idiocy, only in this instance it is given in a much more picturesque and elaborated manner. Barnaby is the hero of the tale. That he should be so placed in a story—planned purposely to concentrate a large part of the interest of the reader—is one of those

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bold and original conceptions which few save Dickens could carry out, and it constitutes one of the finest studies in fiction.

Dickens personally possessed a great deal of the prankish and capricious in his own temperament. One sees that in all his private intercourses, as well as his letters. It pervades the whole of *Pickwick Papers*; it peeps out in all his books, in greater or less degree. The whole tenor and texture of his life partook of the skittish and whimsical. As Mr. Chesterton points out, there was always some prank, some impetuous proposal, some practical joke, some unexpected energy of creation that bore the character of the "divine lunatic" in him, breaking out into some fresh ecstasy of creative power, some energy of personal gaiety or humour, some buoyant fervour of optimism. With this mood there may always be seen to blend that of the big simple child. Dickens may, in fact, always be seen to preserve the purity and freshness of his outlook on life—that beauty and freshness which all external things bring to us, and which most impress us all in the simple idyllic ardour of our early youth. To him this was the secret of happiness. With the child the sky is more blue, the summer more seraphic, the grass more lank and lush, the buttercup and marsh mallow more gorgeously yellow, the birds more joyous. The east wind has no threat of bodily chill. The swan is only beautifully white and feathery. Then all grown-ups on this earth are fair to look upon, and are our friends and protectors. We revel in sights, sounds, and scents of nature, and the fairy wonder of life and people around us. All make their impact upon our child-nature for our delight, imparting an ecstatic sense of freedom and a simple unsophisticated joy in living, all of which, alas! as we grow older, tend to fade into mere memories. It is this part of us, the child-nature in all of us, which is

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so capable of being preserved, but which is in eternal danger of being quelled and utterly destroyed. It is this part of us which Dickens made it the set purpose of his life to unfold completely to us, and it is this part of us, as it is diffused in the general common life, which it was always his object to cherish tenderly: he sought the salvation of the child-soul. Since his day the quest has advanced by very remarkable stages. The year he died public opinion discovered the infant in the school child. A step further, and public opinion is now on the verge of discovering the hitherto quite neglected fact that every child is alive *nine months before it is born*. A body of knowledge and moral sentiment has gathered itself about all that pertains to child-life. The shades of the physician and his hand-maiden of the Red Cross now move restlessly in the purlieus where Dickens once walked—another Sir Galahad in search of another Holy Grail.

When Dickens gave us Barnaby Rudge he proved himself a pioneer as well as a narrator—a reformer as well as a story-teller; and we have unconsciously, or half consciously, followed up the lead he gave us.

Certain people have endeavoured to fix the specific rank and character of Barnaby's idiocy. Like the problem of Hamlet's madness it is elusive, as are most phases of abnormal personality, but its pathology, as presented in Barnaby, will be found to be quite consistent and self-contained. One thing comes out clearly upon study and analysis, and that is, that Dickens seizes hold of his child-nature and shows us *that*, as the material upon which may be rock-based, the salvation of the human soul. Let us endeavour to trace the process and to appraise the result.

In appearance, Barnaby suggests a slight burlesque of the Bohemian figure of Dickens's day. Affectations

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of cult and peculiarities of dandyism were more common then than they are now. Dickens himself was fond of flaming waistcoats and velvet jackets, but he never became infected with that dandyism which many exuberant and artistic spirits exhibit. Keats walked abroad with a large Italian sombrero and a bright scarlet sash. The cult of Byron affected the full-throated display of loose collar. Ruskin remarked that all noble and artistic natures loved bright colours. And we generally find that it is such spirits who display some eccentricity or unconventionality of attire. Barnaby Rudge appeared to be a quaint parody of this tendency. Totally free, however, from any tinge of self-consciousness, his profusion of red hair, his peacock feathers, the little decorative items improvised in his attire, made him a picturesque and fantastic figure. They were the symbol and outer seeming of his curious combination of the child-like, the imaginative, and the artistic. All these things entered into the make-up of a physically robust and buoyant and attractive personality, interesting and pathetic because quaintly and almost unearthly awry.

Immediately upon his introduction to the story we are fascinated with the weirdness of his figure, his ecstasy, his terror in the presence of blood, and the semi-wild instability of his moods. And our sympathetic interest in him and our concern for his welfare hold us to the end. The blood-horror which now and then possessed him was the single point of dementia; it was the single indelible mind-stain corresponding with the blood-coloured birth-mark upon his wrist. We think of Ophelia as we watch the transience of mood, the lack of fixity of attention, and the curious symbolic significance of some of his fanciful and even poetic utterances. They are speaking of the dead man at their feet:—

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“ ‘ I know him, I know him ! ’ ” cried Barnaby, clapping his hands.

“ ‘ Know him ? ’ ” repeated the locksmith.

“ ‘ Hush ! ’ ” said Barnaby, laying his fingers on his lips.

“ ‘ He went out to-day a-wooing. I wouldn’t for a light guinea that he should never go a-wooing again, for if he did some eyes would grow dim that are now as bright as—— See, when I talk of eyes the stars come out ! Whose eyes are they ? If they are angel’s eyes, why do they look down here and see good men hurt and only wink and sparkle all the night ? ’ ”

But his madness is not like that of Ophelia, for these fantastic moods are not sustained or permanent ; they are purely ephemeral. Besides, although his mind was moved with strange and moody vagaries, none were ever vicious ; there was never a sign of the ungovernable passion which afflicts the maniacal imbecile. There are many degrees of mental derangement, ranging from the weakest flickering of intellect, or feeling, or mental helplessness, up to the inflammatory conditions of mania. And although Dickens frequently uses the term “ idiot ” in reference to Barnaby, he is, in reality, no simpleton. His passing moods were invariably those of child-like fancy : he was entirely receptive to the finer impressions of outer life. When unhampered with the intercourse of those about him, his vivacious spirit simply effervesced with quaint turns of fancy : then he could give himself up with the utmost freedom to a wild, roaming life, revelling in the beauties of nature like some singing bird freed from captivity and restraint. To employ an archaic term, he was a “ natural,” and he had some such love of the wild and the natural as possessed Whitman and Wordsworth and Thoreau. It was his love of nature and his responsiveness to the sounds and sights of wild life which preserved the sane in him. Barnaby’s

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“enjoyments were to walk and run, and leap till he was
“tired; then to lie down on the long grass, or by the
“growing corn, or in the shade of some tall trees, look-
“ing upward at the blue sky and listening to the lark
“as she poured out her brilliant song. There were wild
“flowers, too, the bright red poppy, the gentle harebell,
“the cowslip, and the rose. There were birds to watch;
“fish, ants, worms; hares and rabbits, as they darted
“across the distant pathway in the wood, and so were
“gone; millions of living things to have an interest in,
“and lie in wait for, and clap hands and shout in memory
“of, when they had disappeared . . . there was the
“merry sunlight to hunt out as it creeps aslant through
“leaves and boughs of trees, and hid far down deep,
“deep in hollow places, like a silver pool. . . . Sweet
“scents of summer air breathing over fields of beans or
“clover; the perfume of wet leaves or moss; the life of
“waving trees and shadows always changing. . . .”

And so forth, through the unending happiness of a childish fancy, impressed with the beauties and the serenity of the outer world of nature. Who does not remember the delightful walk of Barnaby and his mother to Chigwell? Their subsequent serene and secluded life of happiness was divided between his wanderings with his raven and his dog-friends, his gardening, and the help he gave to his mother at straw-plaiting, by which they eked out a frugal subsistence, until that villainous blind man, Stagg, obtruded himself into their life and attracted him to London and the Gordon Riots. With but this interval his power and resources for revelling joyfully in the life of nature was of the very efflorescence of the child-spirit, and continued to the end. His love for his mother, together with his love of natural things, were the stable elements of his mind, otherwise shadowed by her anxieties, and tinged with the vagaries of quaint and

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even poetic fancy which his buoyant and half-wild temperament inspired. Her love was a divine devotion partaking of a high moral and religious insight into the nature and cause of his affliction. Under her ministrations, and under the influence of his outdoor life, his child attributes were providentially preserved to him, and the unalloyed happiness of youth became his sovereign possession.

There are critics who have averred that if Dickens really intended to portray an idiot in Barnaby Rudge, then he signally failed, for the so-called "idiot" possessed all the fine qualities of an ardent, affectionate and artistic nature. It is, of course, quite true that he possessed some of the finer qualities of sanity and some refinements of an imaginative and poetic nature, with the capacity and trustworthiness for useful labour; nevertheless, these qualities of mind were "sicklied o'er with the pale cast" of fantastic moods. He was a strong young man with many manly traits; but the child in him predominated, and he suffered from the blight of heredity—the blood-horror impressed upon him before his birth by the crime of his father. It was obviously Dickens's intention to create an idiot-character, and in the process *he idealised him*. Dickens lived in a period when the idiot-class shared the general neglect prevalent amongst the whole child-class. His purpose in idealising idiot-characters like Mr. Dick and Barnaby Rudge is very clear and striking. In a healthy environment of tender and affectionate care, with a direct appeal to the child-nature, which is preserved in some degree in all such types of aberrated human being, the capacity for joy and usefulness in life may be best brought out. This is Dickens's great lesson, and this, happily, is the doctrine which has entered into the *régime* of the modern idiot asylum. In such circumstances,

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Dickens's creations of this class are not only plausible, they are possible and realisable, and as creatures of fiction Dickens could well invest them with the most vivid interest, the highest veracity, as well as with all the marks of a high moral purpose.

Like Mr. Dick, Barnaby Rudge was the object of the most tender and considerate care. He was granted the utmost freedom consistent with his infirmity, and the fullest possible life became his. Freed from the attentions of the curious and vulgar, and surrounded by friends who understood him, any appeal to the element of childhood in him inevitably met with a response, and he blossoms forth like a resplendent wild flower. Turn once again to that charming account of the well-remembered tramp to Chigwell, and note the reflections of the anxious mother while her son wanders around and across her route in all the ebullient happiness of his virile spirits. She recounts in her mind his growth from infancy under her affectionate care during the twenty-two years of his life. She reflects on the lights and shadows of his earlier existence, when she watched for the slightest symptoms of sanity and the slenderest capacity for joy, "until he grew a man, *and then his childhood was complete and lasting.*" And such a childhood! Who of us, who live under the shadow and blight of intermittent cares and shattering anxieties, do not envy him, and long for the freedom and bliss of our own childhood, now enjoyed only through the medium of reminiscence? Who of us, under the influence of Dickens, will not henceforth devote ourselves to the preservation of the child in us and around us? For, "Except ye turn, and become "as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the "Kingdom of Heaven."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SPORTSMEN.

“ A universal genius ; at walking, running, rowing, swimming and skating he is unrivalled ; at all games of chance or skill, at hunting, shooting, fishing, riding, driving . . . no one can touch him.”

Sketches of Young Gentlemen.

IT was Forster who once said of Dickens what Johnson had previously said of Garrick, namely, that he was the cheerfullest man of his age. Certain it is that he possessed unwearied animal spirits and an incredible exuberance of physical energy. He bubbled over with the sparkling effervescent wine of life. To him the mere act of breathing was a positive delight. He loved the open air ; he revelled in nature in her every mood. Every pursuit, every form of activity or of rapidity of movement which brought him close to her he followed with a zeal and a relish which knew no bounds.

When he writes of Spring it is as of some magic influence which conjures up memories of childish sports and outdoor games under gently waving trees. Summer to him was redolent of village greens and happy play beside murmuring brooks. Autumn brought him not merely the speechless satisfaction of multi-coloured tints of leaves, rich brown earth and jewelled sunbeams through motionless trees ; it sped through his veins, the exultant fever of hard and tireless rides or of long walks to break the tyranny of nipping winds and early frosts. Winter to him was synonymous with rollicking fun in the snow, with snowballing, skating, hunting or with hard roads upon which the clatter of horses' hoofs made music in his ears, and frozen particles of ice dashed

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and danced laughingly in his face, to be followed when day was done by blazing firesides, warmth, light and boisterous fun indoors. He steeped his hands in happiness; he bathed in good-cheer; he radiated mirth; he breathed fair-play. How then could he be other than a good sportsman?

From the earliest years of his manhood he indulged in the fiercest physical exercises. A thirty mile ride on horseback out and home was a frequent occurrence with him. Like Disraeli, he believed that a canter was the cure for every physical ill. His grounds at Twickenham were made famous by reason of the athletic sports which were constantly held there. Bar-leaping, bowling, and quoits, were pursued with the utmost ardour, and in sustained energy, or rather in what he was pleased to call "keeping it up," Dickens himself out-distanced every competitor. Even the lighter recreations of battledore and bagatelle were pursued with exhausting activity. It is recorded that at the Petersham races, which, like a good neighbour he visited daily whilst they lasted, he worked much harder at the sports than the running horses did. And that notion of finding rest from mental exertion in as much bodily exertion of equal severity, remained with him right up to the last; for we are told that in his later years he was wont to take as many miles in walking as he had previously spent in the saddle. In this he was very like his great contemporary and admirer, John Ruskin; for the latter used to say that to any person who had all his senses about him a walk along ten or twelve miles of road every day was the most amusing of all the recreations of life. Is it any wonder then that a man of vigorous tastes and never-ending pursuits like Dickens should have become one of the most vivacious exponents of sport in our literature, or that we find scattered through his books some of the most charming and arresting sketches and portraits of

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sportsmen ever achieved? Had Dickens never possessed an amazing infatuation for sport, *Pickwick* would never have been written; for it is in that first beatitude of humour, that immortal encyclopædia of laughter and fun, that the boisterous spirits of the man himself are recorded. And, parenthetically, it may be observed that Dickens seems to have transmuted his delight of sport into the very style of his writing itself. And not in *Pickwick* alone is this most clearly and obviously the case; but in almost every other book it will be found on careful scrutiny that it possesses a certain raciness—it is true, peculiarly English—which, for all its soberness is, as Swinburne once said, resplendent in its native luxuriance.

Be that as it may, *Pickwick* it is, surely, which more than any other work, captures and preserves the best characteristics of our race. The fine, careless simplicity of its hero, over which we have all laughed so frequently, is, after all, the quintessence of true sportsmanship which, win or lose, cares not so that it plays the game. Perhaps the modern young man, cumbered with much serving at tennis, who takes golf more seriously than he does life, may tell us that *Pickwick*, *Winkle*, and *Tupman* were duffers who made asses of themselves every time they joined in any sport worthy the name. That, maybe, is largely true; but the point is that they were sportsmen all the time, ready to take the odds at any moment and to join in any fun that was going. They did not mind failing; they did not mind being laughed at. The *Pickwickians* joined in games, not for swagger or to show their cleverness, nor even because they had spent so much of their lives in studying them that they had become expert players. They went in simply for the fun of the thing. Witness dear old *Pickwick's* plight when unable any longer to resist the temptation to follow *Wardle* down the slide:

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“ He paused, considered, pulled off his gloves and put them in his hat; took two or three short runs, balked as often, and at last took another run and went slowly and gravely down the slide, with his feet about a yard and a quarter apart, amidst the gratified shouts of all the spectators.

“ ‘Keep the pot a-biling, Sir!’ said Sam; and down went Wardle again, and then Mr. Pickwick, and then Sam, and then Mr. Winkle, and then Mr. Bob Sawyer, and then the fat boy, and then Mr. Snodgrass, following closely upon each other’s heels, and running after each other with as much eagerness as if all their future prospects in life depended upon their expedition.

“ It was the most intensely interesting thing to observe the manner in which Mr. Pickwick performed his share of the ceremony; to watch the torture of anxiety with which he viewed the person behind gaining upon him at the imminent hazard of tripping him up; to see him gradually expend the painful force he had put on at first, and then turn slowly round on the slide, with his face towards the point from which he started; to contemplate the playful smile which mantled on his face when he had accomplished the distance, and the eagerness with which he turned round when he had done so, and ran after his predecessor: his black gaiters tripping pleasantly through the snow, and his eyes beaming cheerfulness and gladness through his spectacles. And when he was knocked down—which happened, upon the average, every third round—it was the most invigorating sight that can possibly be imagined to behold him gather up his hat, gloves, and handkerchief with a glowing countenance, and resume his station in the ranks with an ardour and enthusiasm nothing could abate.”

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If there is something exquisitely ludicrous in this immortal picture of Pickwick on the ice, there is, at all events, nothing of vulgarity about it. It is redeemed from that by its simplicity; and the true sportsmanship of the man is revealed in the fact that, when Winkle pretends to be able to skate, he is denounced by his friend as a transparent humbug. But one is not so sure about my Lord Mutanhed, one of the young bloods with long hair and a particularly small forehead, whom Mr. Pickwick meets in the Bath Assembly Rooms. His lordship's wonderful mail-cart that he used to drive along the Bristol road was "the neatest, pwettiest, gwacefullest thing that ever wan upon wheels. Painted wed with a cweam piebald," as he told the M.C. at the Pump Room.

"'With a real box for the letters and all complete,' said the Honourable Mr. Crushton.

"'And a little seat in fwont, with an iwon wail for the driver,' added his lordship."

Nine people out of ten, of course, would say that it was more vulgar to slide before village boys than to drive a mail-cart; but, in point of fact, Mutanhed's eccentricities are quite unrelieved by the Pickwickian jollity, though, no doubt, excusable by reason of the amiable nobleman's extreme youth.

In those far-off happy times it was quite *de rigueur* for your young blood about town to handle the ribbons, and Tom and Jerry were never happier than when they could capture the box-seat of a mail coach. It was in vain that Parliament passed prohibitory legislation; in vain that caricaturists emphasised the danger of "being drove by a gentleman." Dickens himself delighted in the sport, and his splendid descriptions of coach rides in *Pickwick* did not a little to revive on saner lines the enthusiasm for the "four-in-hand."

In other books, too, Dickens constantly referred to the glee of coaching. Recall that wonderful description

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in *Martin Chuzzlewit* of Tom Pinch's journey side by side with the coachman, who handled his whip like a swell and gave himself the airs of an emperor.

"He didn't handle his gloves like another man, but put them on—even when he was standing on the pavement, quite detached from the coach—as if the four grays were, somehow or other, at the ends of the fingers. It was the same with his hat. He did things with his hat which nothing but an unlimited knowledge of horses and the wildest freedom of the road could ever have made him perfect in. Valuable little parcels were brought to him with particular instructions, and he pitched them into his hat, and stuck it on again; as if the laws of gravity did not admit of such an event as its being knocked off or blown off, and nothing like an accident could befall it. The guard, too! Seventy breezy miles a day were written in his very whiskers. His manners were a canter; his conversation a round trot. He was a fast coach upon a down-hill turnpike road; he was all pace. A waggon couldn't have moved slowly with that guard and his key-bugle on the top of it.

"These were all foreshadowings of London, Tom thought as he sat upon the box and looked about him. Such a coachman and such a guard never could have existed between Salisbury and any other place. The coach was none of your steady-going, yokel coaches, but a swaggering, rakish, dissipated London coach; up all night, and lying by all day, and leading a devil of a life. It cared no more for Salisbury than if it had been a hamlet. It rattled noisily through the best streets, defied the Cathedral, took the worst corners sharpest, went cutting in everywhere, making everything get out of its way; and spun along the open country-road, blowing a lively defiance out of its key-bugle, as its last glad parting legacy.

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“It was a charming evening. Mild and bright. And even with the weight upon his mind which arose out of the immensity and uncertainty of London, Tom could not resist the captivating sense of rapid motion through the pleasant air. The four grays skimmed along as if they liked it quite as well as Tom did; the bugle was in as high spirits as the grays; the coachman chimed in sometimes with his voice; the wheels hummed cheerfully in unison; the brass work on the harness was an orchestra of little bells; and thus, as they went clinking, jingling, rattling smoothly on, the whole concern, from the buckles of the leaders’ coupling-reins, to the handle of the hind boot, was one great instrument of music.

“Yoho, past hedges, gates, and trees; past cottages and barns, and people going home from work. Yoho, past donkey-chaises, drawn aside into the ditch, and empty carts with rampant horses, whipped up at a bound upon the little watercourse, and held by struggling carters close to the five-barred gate until the coach had passed the narrow turning in the road. Yoho, by churches dropped down by themselves in quiet nooks, with rustic burial-grounds about them, where the graves are green, and daisies sleep—for it is evening—on the bosoms of the dead. Yoho, past streams, in which the cattle cool their feet, and where the rushes grow; past paddock-fences, farms, and rick-yards; past last year’s stacks, cut, slice by slice, away, and showing in the waning light, like ruined gables, old and brown. Yoho, down the pebbly dip, and through the merry water-splash, and up at a canter to the level road again.”

In *American Notes*, in *Bleak House*, in *Sketches by Boz*, and elsewhere, we find very frequent reference to coaching and coaching days, to the autobiography of coaches, their idiosyncrasies, and sometimes their dis-

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comforts as well as their joys; for the author of *Pickwick* realised, with the elder Weller, that "Coaches, Sammy, is like guns—they requires to be loaded with very great care afore they go off."

And, talking of guns, who does not remember that memorable feat at Dingley Dell, when Mr. Winkle shot at a crow and wounded a pigeon? Who does not recall that immortal scene?

"'Now, Mr. Winkle,' said the host, reloading his own gun, 'fire away.'

"Mr. Winkle advanced and levelled his gun. Mr. Pickwick and his friends covered involuntarily to escape damage from the heavy fall of rooks which they felt quite certain would be occasioned by the devastating barrel of their friend. There was a solemn pause—a shout—flapping of wings—a faint click.

"'Halloa!' said the old gentleman.

"'Won't it go?' inquired Mr. Pickwick.

"'Missed fire,' said Mr. Winkle, who was very pale, probably from disappointment.

"'Odd,' said the old gentleman, taking the gun. 'Never knew one of them to miss fire before. Why, I don't see anything of the cap!'

"'Bless my soul!' said Mr. Winkle. 'I declare I forgot the cap!'

"The slight omission was rectified. Mr. Pickwick crouched again. Mr. Winkle stepped forward with an air of determination and resolution, and Mr. Tupman looked out from behind a tree. The boy shouted; four birds flew out. Mr. Winkle fired. There was a scream as of an individual—not a rook—in corporeal anguish. Mr. Tupman had saved the lives of innumerable unoffending birds by receiving a portion of the charge in his left arm."

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But this was not Mr. Winkle's only experience with a gun. One pleasant September day he spent among the birds—much to the partridges' relief, and to the dismay and consternation of his friends and the gamekeeper, who stood throughout in imminent danger of severe wounding or of sudden death. Apart from the description of the buffoonery of the novice with the gun, a more entrancing picture of the virile conditions under which this phase of sport is pursued has never been penned. Hedges, fields and trees, hills and moorland, are presented in their ever-varying shades of deep rich green. We are told that on that fine September morning, scarce a leaf had fallen, scarce a sprinkle of yellow mingled with the hues to warn you that Autumn had begun. Dickens paints in the cloudless sky through which the sun breaks bright and warm. There are the songs of the birds and the hum of myriads of summer insects which filled the air; there are the cottage gardens crowded with flowers of every rich and beautiful tint, sparkling in the dew like beds of glittering jewels. "Everything," he says, "bore the stamp of summer and "none of its beautiful colours had yet faded from the "die."

It needs little imagination to fill in the scene, with the tall raw-boned gamekeeper and the half-booted leather-leggined boy, with their capacious bags and their brace of pointers. Nor, knowing what we do of the ineffable blunderer Winkle, does it make demands upon our credulity to learn that he "flashed and blazed and smoked away "without producing any material results . . . some- "times expending his charge in mid-air, and at others "sending it skimming along so near the surface of the "ground as to place the lives of the two dogs on a "rather uncertain and precarious tenure."

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As an anecdote, germane to the subject, yet distinct from actual episodes, one may recall Mr. Jingle's story of the Sagacious Dog:—

“Ah! you should keep dogs—fine animals—sagacious creatures—dog of my own once—Pointer—surprising instinct—out shooting one day—entering enclosure—whistled—dog stopped—whistled again—Ponto—no go; stock still—called him—Ponto! Ponto!—wouldn't move—dog transfixed—staring at a board—looked up, saw an inscription—‘Game-keeper has orders to shoot all dogs found in this enclosure’—wouldn't pass it—wonderful dog—valuable dog that—very.”

It has already been indicated that Dickens, like all good sportsmen, had an overwhelming love for animals—especially horses and dogs. From those early years, when “Gyp” was his daily companion, he lost no opportunity of writing of them, and one often thinks the words he puts into the mouth of the gentleman on the Canterbury-London coach in *Copperfield* were an expression of his own intimate views, “Orses and dorgs is some men's fancy. They're wittles and drink to me.” The friendship and fidelity of “Diogenes” is portrayed in *Dombey*: the gambols of “Boxer” are described in the *Cricket on the Hearth*: Sikes's dog to Charley and the Dodger was “a Christian” because he hated “other dogs as ain't of his breed.” Similarly, horses were depicted from every point of view—the lazy, the fast, the tenacious, the intelligent, the haggard, and the sleek.

Cricket was a game that used to warm Dickens's heart. It was a pursuit in which fun was rampant and of which fun could be made. How merrily does he use it in the famous match between All Muggleton and Dingley Dell. Dumkins and Podder, it will be remembered, go to the

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wickets for All Muggleton, and they collar the bowling at once.

“‘Play!’ suddenly cried the bowler. The ball flew from his hand straight and swift towards the centre stump of the wicket. The wary Dumkins was on the alert; it fell upon the tip of the bat and bounded far away over the heads of the scouts, who had just stooped low enough to let it fly over them.

“‘Run—run—another! Now, then, throw her up—up with her—stop there—another—no—yes—no—throw her up, throw her up!’ Such were the shouts that followed the stroke, and at the conclusion of which All Muggleton had scored two. Nor was Podder behindhand in earning laurels with which to garnish himself and Muggleton. He blocked the doubtful balls, missed the bad ones, took the good ones, and sent them flying to all parts of the field. The scouts were hot and tired; the bowlers were changed, and bowled till their arms ached; but Dumkins and Podder remained unconquered. Did an elderly gentleman essay to stop the progress of the ball, it rolled between his legs or slipped between his fingers. Did a slim gentleman try to catch it, it struck him on the nose and bounded pleasantly off with redoubled violence, while the slim gentleman’s eyes filled with water and his form writhed with anguish. Was it thrown straight up to the wicket, Dumkins had reached it before the ball. In short, when Dumkins was caught out and Podder stumped out, All Muggleton had notched some fifty-four, while the score of the Dingley Dellers was as blank as their faces. The advantage was too great to be recovered. In vain did the eager Luffey and the enthusiastic Struggles do all that skill and experience could sug-

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gest to regain the ground that Dingley Dell had lost in the contest. It was of no avail; and in the early period of the winning game Dingley Dell gave in and allowed the superior prowess of All Muggleton."

"Notching" a stick, of course, was the old-fashioned method of scoring runs at a cricket match, in vogue in the days before ladies had, strange to relate, invented overhand bowling, and when fielders stood, if we are to believe Dickens, "stooping very much as if they were making a back at leap-frog."

These things have changed; but the whole-hearted pleasure in the game—the keenness, the good feeling and good nature it engenders—these still remain, and it will be a bad day for the race and for the Empire if ever we lose them.

It may shock the Puritan to learn that there is ample evidence to justify the suspicion that Dickens displayed a really fierce delight in a good fight. With him, however, as with all men who know the real meaning of the word "sport," it was the outcome of his pride of artistry which made him do a thing well for its own sake, independent of fee or reward, gate-money or purse.

Take, for instance, "The Game Chicken," a perfect type, a complete realisation of the old kind of "pug." Look at him as he stands "in his shaggy white waist-coat and flat-brimmed hat, which he always stood weighing in both hands, twitching his head and nose, both of which had been a good many times broken and but indifferently repaired." We are back at once to the old days of the ring, when championships were not fought out in the decorous seclusion of the National Sporting Club, but in a suburban field, with the police held at bay by madly excited crowds, wildly cheering the combatants;—back to the days when Tom Sayers's

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fight with Heenan, watched by the Prime Minister himself, made him the idol of half the nation, and every schoolboy founded his form on that of "The Tipton Slasher." The particular combat which had rescued "The Chicken" from obscurity was, as Mr. Toots told Captain Cuttle, his fight with "The Nobby Shropshire One," and he had been thereon retained to instruct Paul Dombey's friend in "the noble art." Capitally they got on till his patron would not let him chastise his successful rival in Florence Dombey's affections, and then:—

"'Come, master,' said the Chicken, 'is it to be gammon or pluck? Which?'"

"'Chicken,' returned Mr. Toots, 'your expressions are coarse, and your meaning is obscure.'"

"'Why, then, I tell you what, master,' said the Chicken, 'this is where it is. It's mean.'"

"'What is mean, Chicken?' asked Mr. Toots.

"'It is,' said the Chicken, with a frightful corugation of his broken nose. 'There! Now, master Wot! W'en you go and blow on this 'ere match to the stiff 'un'—by which deprecatory appellation it has been since supposed that the Game One intended to signify Mr. Dombey—'and when you could knock the winner and all the kit of 'em dead out of wind and time, are you going to give in? To *give in*?' said the Chicken, with contemptuous emphasis. 'W'y, it's mean!'"

"'Chicken,' said Mr. Toots, severely, 'you're a perfect vulture! Your sentiments are atrocious!'"

"'My sentiments is game and fancy, master,' returned the Chicken. 'That's wot my sentiments is. I can't abear a meanness. I'm afore the public, I'm to be heerd on at the bar of "The Little Helephant," and no Guv'ner o' mine mustn't go and do what's mean. W'y, it's mean,' said the Chicken,

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with increased expression. 'That's where it is. It's mean.'

"'Chicken,' said Mr. Toots, 'you disgust me.'

"'Master,' returned the Chicken, putting on his hat, 'there's a pair on us, then. Come! Here's a offer! You've spoke to me more than once't or twice't about the public line. Never mind! Give me a Fi'typunnote to-morrow and let me go.'

"'Chicken,' returned Mr. Toots, 'after the odious sentiments you have expressed, I shall be glad to part on such terms.'

"'Done, then,' said the Chicken. 'It's a bargain. This here conduct of yourn won't suit *my* book, master. W'y, it's mean,' said the Chicken, who seemed equally unable to get beyond that point, and to stop short of it. 'That's where it is. It's mean!'

"'It's mean, that's wot it is, it's mean.'"

Somehow one feels that the words are eloquent of a simplicity, a code of honour, even, whose edge has got more than a little blunted these days when even boxing contests are not above suspicion of being worked and not won. "The Chicken" himself may have been a humbug, but his words, at least, ring true.

Who cannot recall young David's valiant but ill-fated fight with the young butcher in Canterbury; or Dick Swiveller's performance upon the flushed and dishevelled person of Daniel Quilp in the public street; or Pip's fight, without provocation until he was butted in the stomach, with "the pale young gentleman"? In every line of these descriptions there will be discovered the joy of a man who had tasted the sweets of a physical encounter, and knew how to keep himself "fit."

One catches the same predominating idea of vigorous manhood in its pursuit of strong exercises in the case of the Reverend Minor Canon Crisparkle, who, like "The Game Chicken," "could do a bit with his hands quietly."

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He, however, was first wont to break the thin morning ice near Cloisterham Weir with his amiable head, much to the invigoration of his frame. A sharp walk home, and the next view of him is before his looking-glass boxing with himself with great science and prowess.

“A fresh and healthy portrait the looking-glass presented of the Reverend Septimus, feinting and dodging with the utmost artfulness, and hitting out from the shoulder with the utmost straightness, while his radiant features teemed with innocence, and soft-hearted benevolence beamed from his boxing gloves. . . .”

And then enter the Minor Canon's mother, and the gloves are put away.

“It was pleasant to see . . . the old lady standing to say the Lord's Prayer aloud, and her son, Minor Canon, nevertheless, standing with bent head to hear it, he being within five years of forty: much as he had stood to hear the same words from the same lips when he was within five months of four.”

A good type of sportsman, surely!

Great as was Dickens's infatuation for all these things, it was the river, and more particularly the Thames, which exerted the greatest spell over his mind and character. To him it was at once the home and mother of all true sport. But it was more. It was the mirror which, like an April day, reflected all shades of human emotion and feeling; it was at night the reflector of dark and brooding thoughts and fell designs. In *The Chimes* he poetically describes it as “the portal of Eternity.” What arresting and stirring pictures he gave us of the great rolling stream below London Bridge; equally, what memorable vignettes do we get of the upper reaches and the hamlets on its tortuous banks! There is one passage in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, which seems to epitomise all

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that he ever wrote of the water scenes down Woolwich way, and it is quoted because it is so essentially characteristic, even at the present day.

“A fleet of barges were coming lazily on, some sideways, some head first, some stern first; all in a wrong-headed, dogged, obstinate way, bumping up against the larger craft, running under the bows of steamboats, getting into every kind of nook and corner where they had no business, and being crunched on all sides like so many walnut-shells; while each, with its pair of long sweeps struggling and splashing in the water, looked like some lumbering fish in pain. In some of the vessels at anchor all hands were busily engaged in coiling ropes, spreading out sails to dry, taking in or discharging their cargoes; in others, no life was visible but two or three tarry boys, and perhaps a barking dog running to and fro upon the deck or scrambling up to look over the side and bark the louder for the view. Coming slowly on through the forests of masts, was a great steam-ship, beating the water in short impatient strokes with her heavy paddles, as though she wanted room to breathe, and advancing in her huge bulk like a sea monster among the minnows of the Thames. On either hand were long black tiers of colliers; between them, vessels slowly working out of harbour with sails glistening in the sun, and creaking noises on board, re-echoed from a hundred quarters. The water and all upon it was in active motion, dancing and buoyant and bubbling up; while the old grey Tower and piles of building on the shore, with many a church spire shooting up between, looked coldly on, and seemed to disdain their chafing neighbour.”

In narrative form, and in the same atmosphere, one of the most splendid instances of sportsmanship which

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even the pages of Dickens afford is to be found in *Great Expectations*, when young Pip risks his position and his neck to save from arrest his friend Provis, the convict, and to get him back safe and sound to Australia. The plan is a bold one. A passage is booked on a steamer which shall pick up the man down the river and take him to Hamburg. Pip and his friends are to meet the steamer in a boat, and to hand over their charge; and, to prevent any possibility of a hitch, poor Pip spends his time sculling on the river till he is perfectly familiar with the navigation of the lower reaches.

At last the day of the attempt arrives. Pip watches the smoke of the steamer, coming head on. They put out, and "I saw a four-oared galley shoot out from under the bank a little way ahead of us, and row out into the same track."

It is a dreadful scene that follows. On the galley are Customs officers, and with them the man who has ruined Provis's life, the man he has sworn to kill, and who in terror is pursuing him, backed by the resources of the law.

"The galley, which was skilfully handled, had crossed us, let us come up with her

"'You have a returned transport there,' said the man who held the lines. 'That's the man, wrapped in the cloak. His name is Abel Magwitch, otherwise Provis. I apprehend that man, and call upon him to surrender, and you to assist.'

"At the same moment, without giving any audible direction to his crew, he ran the galley aboard of us. . . . In the same moment I saw the steersman of the galley lay his hand on the prisoner's shoulder. . . . Still in the same moment I saw the prisoner start up, lean across his captor, and pull the cloak from the neck of the shrinking sitter in the galley. Still in the same moment I saw that

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the face disclosed was the face of the other convict of long ago. Still in the same moment I saw the face tilted backward with a white terror on it that I shall never forget, and heard a great cry on board the steamer and a loud splash in the water and felt the boat sink from under me.

“It was but for an instant that I seemed to struggle with a thousand mill-weirs and a thousand flashes of light; that instant past, I was taken on board the galley. Herbert was there, and Startop was there; but our boat was gone, and the two convicts were gone.”

There were many other river scenes, such as, for example, those in *Our Mutual Friend*, which reveal the exhilaration as well as the peace and serenity which the river had for Dickens himself. In half a dozen sentences he can depict all the spirit of freedom and joyousness which it invariably creates in its devotees. His slighter sketches witness with what gusto he would enter into a description of a working-class party excursion up to Hampton, or down below Greenwich!

On the other hand, if it be true that he could rapidly produce a vivid picture of the river in a few broad lines, it is equally a fact that in certain of his stories he would devote chapters to creating the river atmosphere, whether below or above Richmond Bridge, until, as you read on, you are not only familiarised with the river—you are actually living on its banks; you know all its quaint little Thames-side towns.

The sportsmanship of Dickens would burst out in notes of exuberant joy as he portrayed the dancing drift of the boat or the delights of a good pull against the tide. It is easy to realise the keen pleasure with which he describes the rise and fall of the sculls, their rhythmic disappearance, and the drip of the sparkling water as

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they appear again. To Dickens there was mental music in the sound of oars controlled and propelled by the strong hands of "even an amateur sculler well up to his work."

Dickens loved, too, to linger over riverside or anglers' inns, and all the locks had a singular fascination for him. Their tragic suggestiveness, their dark capacity for a crime by night, their loneliness, and the inevitability of the rising torrent with its sure capacity to engulf a captive or suck a human down, induced him to use them with unerring dramatic effect. Plashwater Weir-mill Lock is surely a never-to-be-forgotten memory. You hear the creaking of the gates, as they open to receive the flood, and close by force again. You watch the sluice pouring in, and the rise of the water; and then the ease and facility with which, say, Mr. Eugene Wrayburn sculls himself away, past "the wooden objects by the weir, which showed like huge teetotums standing at rest in the water."

Whenever I pass through the locks at Teddington, or Molesey, or Shepperton, or even as far up the river as Henley, where stood his own "Anglers' Inn," I instinctively reconstruct that resolute and determined chase of Wrayburn by Bradley Headstone, disguised as a bargeman; and I inevitably recall that conversation between Bradley and Riderhood, as they sat on the green slopes of the lock, the one chewing the grass which he plucked—that conversation of concentrated frenzy and rage and incipient crime. "The boat went on, under "arching trees and over their tranquil shadows in the "water. The bargeman skulking on the opposite bank "of the stream went on after it. Sparkles of light "showed Riderhood when and where the rower dipped "his blades, until, even as he stood idly watching, the "sun went down and the landscape was dyed red."

And if you would test the amazing accuracy of Dickens's descriptions of river sports, attend even any

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modern regatta on the Thames, from Henley to Twickenham (they fall in regular sequence and order), and then read this old-world story of a Rowing Match in the chapter on "The River," in *Sketches by Boz*.

"A well-contested rowing match on the Thames is a very lively and interesting scene. The water is studded with boats of all sorts, kinds, and descriptions; places in the coal barges at the different wharfs are let to crowds of spectators; beer and tobacco flow freely about; men, women, and children wait for the start in breathless expectation; cutters of six and eight oars glide gently up and down, waiting to accompany their *protégés* during the race; bands of music add to the animation, if not to the harmony of the scene; groups of watermen are assembled at the different stairs, discussing the merits of the respective candidates; and the prize wherry, which is rowed slowly about by a pair of sculls, is an object of general interest.

"Two o'clock strikes, and everybody looks anxiously in the direction of the bridge through which the candidates for the prize will come—half-past two, and the general attention which has been preserved so long begins to flag, when suddenly a gun is heard, and a noise of distant hurra'ing along each bank of the river—every head is bent forward—the noise draws nearer and nearer—the boats which have been waiting at the bridge start briskly up the river, and a well-manned galley shoots through the arch, the sitters cheering on the boats behind them, which are not yet visible.

"'Here they are,' is the general cry—and through darts the first boat, the men in her, stripped to the skin, and exerting every muscle to preserve the advantage they have gained—four other boats follow close astern; they are not two boats' length between

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them—the shouting is tremendous, and the interest intense. ‘Go on, Pink’—‘Give it her, Red’—‘Sulliwin for ever’—‘Bravo! George.’—‘Now, Tom, now—now—now—why don’t your partner stretch out?’—‘Two pots to a pint on Yellow,’ &c., &c. Every little public-house fires its gun, and hoists its flag; and the men who win the heat, come in, amidst a splashing and shouting, and banging and confusion, which no one can imagine who has not witnessed it, and of which any description would convey a very faint idea.”

It would be easy to write chapters about Dickens’s own prowess as a Sportsman. His walking feats alone are a romance, so set are they with vivid interest and natural story. The anecdotes that have collected around his canters on horseback, and the pranks he was wont to play upon his friends and associates, are legion. As has already been pointed out, his reserve of vitality was extraordinary, and the hardest task found him as light as a bird. Instance that hurricane second lecturing tour in America, when he recited his most affecting pieces at the cost of enormous energy, to densely packed halls. Nothing would suit his whimsical fancy but to organise “a great international walking match” between his three friends, James T. Fields (“Massachusetts Jimmy”), George Dolby (“The Man o’ Ross”), and J. R. Osgood (“The Boston Bantam”). Dickens himself, as “The Gadshill Gasper,” having walked the course, acted as umpire, and caused no end of amusement by his comments, gestures, and pranks. He was, to the end of his days, to all his intimate friends only a great big boy—a grown-up lad, with youth’s irrepressible spirit for all that was invigorating and energising in life. Maybe it was this innate sense of scrupulous fairness—so characteristic of the true sportsman—which gave to Dickens’s teaching that atmosphere of resolute justice,

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that idea of unvarying rectitude, and which prompted him to slash at fraud and deceit and cunning, and at all men who did not "play the game," with that matchless sarcasm of his, which, truly, was as keen as a blade of tempered steel.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PHILANTHROPISTS.

“It is a most extraordinary thing . . . that these Philanthropists are always denouncing somebody. And it is another most extraordinary thing that they are always so violently flush of micreants!”

Edwin Drood. Chap. VI.

OLD time Philanthropy is a fallen faith. Few men believe in it; fewer practice it. As a cure for poverty it is laughed out of court, even as a passing palliative it is regarded with suspicion. It is a kind of sentimental Ishmael wandering in a world of perplexing social problems. In Dickens's day it possessed just as many intolerably objectionable features as in our own; it had however, correspondingly more virtues. Dickens may not, and, in all probability, did not, regard it as the solution of the economic evils of which he was so clearly conscious; but he constantly kept it in view as an instrument of personal and social improvement, and as a means of temporary relief of indigence and suffering. Dickens, with some distant attachment to early Victorian economics, constantly tried to discriminate between the right and wrong sorts of philanthropy; and if we can rid ourselves of the prejudice which in these latter days has come to be associated with the mere mention of the word, we shall realise that he was justified—especially in his vigorous appreciation of its ameliorative effects on individual lives and characters.

The so-called “modern man” will, however, rejoice more in Dickens's masterly and vitriolic attacks on Public Philanthropy masquerading, as it did, in his day,

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as in ours, in many forms and many guises. Any *organised* phase of benevolence he eyed with profoundest suspicion. To him, charity was an emotion, a spiritual impulse; when it became "organised" it became degraded into a mechanical sordid office, even when its aim was excellent. Thus many of Dickens's most amazingly humorous and satiric portraitures were derived from that phase of social activity.

For example, *Bleak House* contains many fine word pictures of the strutting and purblind philanthropist, who handles the objects of his charity as though they were merely dumb cattle. To Dickens, these monstrous organisations for the relief of somebody or everybody were merely mountains in labour to produce the proverbial mouse of a miserable dole for the poor. Besides, there was so much that was demoralising in its influence in this form of benevolence, alike to donor and recipient, that Dickens despised it. But in striking contrast always, he set private and unobtrusive good-will and unostentatious and unavowed good works as noble and inspiring things.

One of the most persistent criticisms has been that Dickens never portrayed a true English gentleman. In John Jarndyce of *Bleak House* we have, not only a superlative type of full-hearted manhood, but a pervading atmosphere of benignant and rational charity which bespeaks the highest and finest gentility. It is the direct antithesis of the rampant wrongheadedness and vulgarity represented by the Honeythunders, the Par-diggles, and the Jellybys, the Quales and the Gushers. Good John Jarndyce is known to everybody who "wanted to do anything with anybody else's money." His correspondence each morning bulked with evidence of the remarkable powers of certain persons to form themselves into Committees for "giving and laying out money."

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As in our own day, the ladies were more desperate in this enterprise than the men. Both in their manner of collecting and administering charity they were the more impassioned and vehement. Whole lives are passed in searching directories for those biological specimens of the great natural order of Benevolent Persons that are their prey. On these are expended, when found, the complete circle of the sciences in the processes of classification, and the determination of qualities and attributes. Classes, sub-classes, species, sub-species, and all varieties, are duly labelled by a card. Each card specifies the distinctive character of the specimen, when found, in terms of cash or gift-giving. The description is potent, probable, or explicit. Some are docketed as penny philanthropists, or shilling, half-crown, half-sovereign, sovereign, note, cheque, &c., up to any multiple in gold current. Those who are not eligible specimens for cash are eligible for kind. Anything and everything is wanted. "They wanted wearing apparel, they wanted rags, they wanted money, they wanted coals, they wanted soup, they wanted interest, they wanted autographs, they wanted flannel." They wanted whatever you had, or had not. Their objects were bewildering in their superlative importance and magnitude: to raise new buildings, or to pay off old debts. One great scheme was to build a Picturesque Building—engraving of West Elevation attached—to be the sacred house of a sequestered Sisterhood of Marys. Testimonials and portraits and annuities to deserving workers and helpers, there were galore. The titles they gave themselves and the uniforms they wore were varied. They were "The Women of England"; "The Daughters of Britain"; "The Sisters of all the Cardinal Virtues"; or "The Females of America." In addition to their frenzied passion for canvassing, collecting, distributing, &c., they

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were in a perpetual fever of internal agitation, antagonism, and propaganda about electing, appointing, and voting of officials who were incarnations of all these powers. And so forth. How familiar we are to-day with all these symptoms of rapacious benevolence, and a false propaganda of need!

One of the most prominent ladies in this tragi-comic army is Mrs. Pardiggle, a veritable vulture in this desert of cold charity. She descends like an Arctic winter, and all her little family of Pardiggles are blue with the chill thereof; for she carries her frosty and weazened brood of five young philanthropists wherever she goes. They are budding examples of cold-house forcing in the Philanthropic Garden. They flower phenomenally in farthings and other coppery blooms. They are pledged in the *Infant Bonds of Joy* to the non-use of tobacco, and to the children's begging-card device. And they pursue these aims with ferocious, joyless and acetic energy. Poor things! Their misery is evidently due to the fact that they have been skinned of their pocket-money and deprived of the simple delights of childhood in the sweeping North Wind of this campaign of vulgarity perpetrated in the name of charity.

Mrs. Pardiggle recognises in Mrs. Jellyby a great benefactor, whose mission to the natives and the home population of the distant Borriboola-Gha, on the left bank of the Niger, is deserving of a helping hand. But she has a nice and acidulated dissent from the methods of that great philanthropist. Mrs. Jellyby neglects to bring her available family into requisition in her great work and her great sacrifices. Parenthetically it may be observed that neglect generally characterises her hearth and home. And the smiling and happy serenity of Mrs. Jellyby amid the wreck she creates is a picture in the

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tragi-comic. Mrs. Pardiggle is a philanthropic bird of prey, who has the power, like the wicked God-mother, of assuming incontinently, the aspect of many zoological forms. And she is proud of it. "I am a School lady, "I am a Visiting lady, I am a Reading lady, I am a "Distributing lady; I am on the Local Linen Box Committee, and many general Committees; and my canvassing alone is very extensive."

And does not every working man's wife well know this fury of philanthropy? Her energy is as untiring as her virtuous solicitation is obdurate. She comes to their doors while they are at the wash-tub, and sits and gossips comfortably while they slave. She learns all about their business and that of the husband. What he earns; what his politics are; what inn, club or chapel he goes to; what are each and all their religious views—man, wife, children, and lodgers; whether they go to Sunday School or take the Parish Magazine, or read the tracts left. And in general she ropes them in, or fences them out, for or against Church and Party. And where she can, she extracts from them pence for the parson's greenhouse, or his new dwelling, or his idiot son's comfortable disposal in a Home, or a new church organ, or the thousand and one petty charities of the purely materialistic order.

One of the most pernicious effects of the Visiting Philanthropist is the power she wields of labelling her "clients" either Liberal, or Socialist, or Tory, or Atheist; and in dealing with all their chances in life accordingly. Her relations with the wealthy are never confined merely to organisations of charity. Who can tell to where the ramifications of her ministry lead, or what adverse influences they evoke?

But Dickens is concerned mainly with the spirit and effect of her work as charity; that is to say, of the par-

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ticular brand which she purveys—that hectoring, strait-waistcoated sort of loathsomeness. And we are taken by the master into the hovel of a brickmaker, and see it in oral and moral operation :

“ ‘ Well, my friends,’ said Mrs. Pardiggle. . . .
“ ‘ How do you do all of you? I am here again. I told
“ ‘ you you couldn’t tire me, you know. I am fond of
“ ‘ hard work and am true to my word. . . .’

“ ‘ Then make it easy for her,’ growled the man. ‘ I
“ ‘ wants it done and over. I wants a end of these
“ ‘ liberties took with my place. I wants an end of
“ ‘ being drawed like a badger. Now you’re going to
“ ‘ poll-pry and question according to custom. I know
“ ‘ what you’re going to be up to. Well, you haven’t
“ ‘ any occasion to be up to it.

“ ‘ I’ll save you the trouble. Is my daughter a
“ ‘ washin’? Yes, she is a washin’. Look at the water.
“ ‘ Smell it! That’s wot we drinks. Now, do you like
“ ‘ it, and what do you think of gin, instead? An’t my
“ ‘ place dirty? Yes, it is dirty—its nat’rally dirty—
“ ‘ and its nat’rally onwholesome; and we’ve had five
“ ‘ dirty and onwholesome children, as is all dead infants,
“ ‘ and so much the better for them and for us besides.
“ ‘ Have I read the little book wot you left? No, I an’t
“ ‘ read the little book wot you left. There an’t nobody
“ ‘ here as knows how to read it; and if there was, it
“ ‘ wouldn’t be suitable to me. It’s a book fit for a
“ ‘ babby, and I’m not a babby. If you was to leave me
“ ‘ a doll, I shouldn’t nuss it. How have I been con-
“ ‘ ducting myself? Why, I’ve been drunk for three
“ ‘ days—and I’d a been drunk for four, if I’d had the
“ ‘ money. Don’t I never mean for to go to church?
“ ‘ No, I don’t never mean for to go to church. I
“ ‘ shouldn’t be expected there, if I did; the beadle’s too
“ ‘ gen-teel for me. And how did my wife get that

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“ ‘black eye? Why, I giv’ it her; and if she says I
“ ‘didn’t she’s a Lie.’ ”

That is frankly a brutally cold douche of the truth, but it is invigorating and refreshing nevertheless. One can feel all the pitiless scorn which Dickens had for these prying “Moral Policemen” who, like Mrs. Pardiggle, forcibly take their victims into religious custody as if marching them off to a Station-house. She makes no scruples of showing that she can do her charities by wholesale in the same vigorous and rigorous way that a cow-boy rounds up cattle with deft horsemanship and the stock-whip. Sometimes this method does not go down with the human article. Hence the humour, and the ludicrous situation of the Pardiggles. The episode and the characters have a reality which is most convincing. And the moral of such benevolence is obvious. Against the futility of the Pardiggle spirit, Dickens does not fail to show the other side of the picture in the working of the true charity inspired by some humanitarian sentiment and some common healthy feeling. The ministrations of the sweet and gentle Esther, after the departure of Mrs. Pardiggle, find at once the human heart in the wife of the brickmaker. And the entry of the neighbour, with her womanly sympathy at the death of the baby, is an instance of how the poor can sympathise with the poor; how, indeed, the poor alone do properly understand the poor. Beneath the coarseness and the violence are always the well-springs of common virtues, and in true charity and helpfulness they bubble forth and refresh both “him who gives and him who takes.”

This sort of charity is infective; it spreads with more swiftness than do the germs of evil. Jenny and Liz, the wives of two rough brick makers, never forgot their benefactor; and, as the sequel shows, they befriended

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the boy Jo, and were the humble and affectionate means of returning Esther's humanity a hundred-fold. Such is the vital power of real sympathy, and of that charity which is not puffed up! It pulses with every throb of hearts that ache. Its insight is unerring; it penetrates at once through all the overlaying "slag" of human frailties and coarseness to the "seed of perfection" which, as Whitman tells us, nestles beneath. It draws the inspiration of some vague, indefinable, but potent grace which ministers to the soul, while it sanely and sufficiently directs the aid in material needs. John Jarndyce, Esther, and Ada were its very incarnations. We see this in the rescue of the mother-child, "Charley." We see it in the sisterly affection and faithfulness which linked Esther and her little serving maid, the heroine of the wash tub. We see it in the motherly watchfulness of Mrs. Blinder, of Bell's Yard, who forgave the orphans their rent in times of sore need. We see it in the nursing which Esther and "Charley" bestowed, at the risk of their lives, on the poor, befouled, fever-ridden Jo of the slums. These are the exemplification of those tender intimacies of private and unostentatious charity, for which Dickens always pleads, and against which he always sets in ironic contrast that organised philanthropy which vaunteth vainly and ignominiously fails.

In *Edwin Drood* we have another instance of Dickens's destructive satire upon organised philanthropy, in the person of the portly and loud-voiced Mr. Luke Honeythunder. He is the Chairman of the Convened Chief Composite Committee of Central and District Philanthropists. The high-sounding and ambitious title alone implies the satiric contempt with which Dickens viewed such organisations. Honeythunder is the guardian of Neville and Helena Landless, and is the very antithesis

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of John Jarndyce, the guardian of Richard Carstone and Ada Clare. The one is the embodiment of gentleness and sane humanity; the other a large man of aggressive egoism, and blatant speech and manners. His propaganda of philanthropy was of the explosive and warring sort that crowded to the wall everybody who was not wearing the insignia of his benevolent order. His voluminous correspondence was dated from the Haven of Philanthropy, Chief Offices, London, into which he shouldered or hustled all converts. To use the words of the Reverend Mr. Septimus Crisparkle, "he seized them by the scruff of the neck and bumped them into the paths of peace." Like the gentle and neat Mrs. Crisparkle, we need all our share of philanthropy, and all our sense of humour, to remain tolerant and happy in his presence, so intoxicated is he by the sense of his own personality and the exuberance of his own verbosity. Like Bulstrode the Banker in *Middlemarch*, he "gloried in a sort of vampire feast in the sense of "mastery." He talks in private as if he were addressing a public meeting, his manner and voice suggestive of extensive areas and a multitudinous audience. We are suffocated in the hot atmosphere of his monstrous loquacity and ineffable cocksureness. He is brutally literal, fiercely brusque, with colossal self-sufficiency and self-absorption—the very archetype of the professional philanthropist.

Like George Eliot and Meredith, Dickens was always amused and contemplative when in contact with inflated egoisms. His *Dombey* is a fine study of the self-absorbed Commercial Egoist, as Meredith's Sir Wiloughby Patterne is a study of the Society Egoist. And, in the brief but vivid sketch of *Honeythunder*, we have a familiar type of the Philanthropic Egoist, who blindly imagines that the world holds nothing superior to his

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own ideas and conduct. He has all the superlative vices of the prig, who is consumed with the desire to show you that he has opinions, and is overwhelmingly generous in offering them to all as a free gift. He spreads himself with aggressive self-assertiveness and self-complacency. He shows detestation of all outside his circle. His expansive self-sphere absorbs all subordinated influences that minister to his vanities and his moralities. He is, of course, devoid of all sense of humour and detests a joke; he declares he never sees one. The person who perpetrates one in his presence disturbs the focus of the great Honeythunder as the cynosure of observation. It spoils the nice pose and erectness of his Capital "I." The joker is frowned down immediately. Honeythunder is, in fine, the incarnation of the intoxicated selfwill, and the desire for absolute power, forgetful quite of the limiting presence of all other humans; he is the real and vivid presentation of the unconscionable egoist whose watchwords are "altruism" and "the service of others."

Who has not met such a painful and preposterous personage in real life? And who has not been compelled to draw large drafts on the sense of humour in order to endure him? Dickens does real service in presenting him in the light of the comic, for by this we are enabled to cultivate our resources for humourous defence. In this spirit does the Reverend Septimus Crisparkle tackle him. All the devices of delineation and of contrast Dickens employs successfully to show us the meanness, the futility, and the mediocrity of people of his class, and their utter inadequacy to be of any service in great emergencies. The simple duties of the guardian to young Neville Landless and his sister were clearly in incompetent hands. Both were left to the tender ministrations of others. Mr. Crisparkle's determined and

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faithful attachment for, and defence of, Neville, his pupil, despite the charge of the murder of Edwin Drood (a charge that was dismissed), is a beautiful example of the true spirit of charity. "I may regard my profession," said the Reverend gentleman, "from a point of view which teaches me that its first duty is towards those who are in necessity and tribulation, who are desolate and oppressed."

"Good fellow! manly fellow!" says Dickens. "And he was so modest, too. There was no more self-assertion in the Minor Canon than in the school boy who had stood in the breezy playing-fields keeping a wicket. He was simply and staunchly true to his duty alike in the large case and in the small. So all true souls ever are. So every true soul ever was, ever is, and ever will be. There is nothing little to the really great in spirit." All this, from the Chapter headed "Philanthropy Professional and Unprofessional," makes a fine sermon in charity contrasts.

Take another type of beaming, jolly, cheery benevolence, as represented by the Cheeryble Brothers. How it does one's heart good to read the description of the meeting between young Nicholas Nickleby and Charles Cheeryble outside the Registry Office! The one anxiously concerned about employment, the other benevolently and cheerily penetrative in his perception of need, and delicately and with sly good humour drawing the young man on to a revelation of his circumstances. We can see Dickens revelling in this picture of the glorious old gentleman, who, with his twin brother—his duplicate self—conduct their City business in a genial atmosphere of kind-heartedness and confidence. We follow Nicholas and his newly-found friend and employer to the office; and at once we appreciate how easy and natural it is for business relations to be permeated by

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the spirit of cheery, mutual service, rather than oppressed by sour hectoring, and the huckstering spirit of profit-mongering. We are not surprised to see that good old Tim Linkinwater should so enjoy his work as to be utterly offended at the suggestion of superannuation and a country life.

In the good, old-fashioned and more simple days, when saner business relations obtained, we have all met many Tim Linkinwaters, who, enjoying the good-will and trust of their employers, took an artistic pride in their ledgers, and whose contentedness and freedom *in* labour made them utterly and for ever strangers to the desire for freedom *from* labour. We realise what it is that makes Tim love his attic and his flower pots, his blind old blackbird in the large snug cage, and his outlook upon the City square. There is here no mean "grubbing in the bins of trade," so contemptible to Ibsen; no sign of "the bagman's millennium," which George Combe fore-saw in his day as the outcome of the Cobden competitive ideals; no sign of Herbert Spencer's "beneficent private war which makes one man strive to climb over the shoulders of another man"; no sign of the competitive paradise for evil-doers under the Manchester economic law, which grants survival to the mean, grasping Scrooges and Ralph Nicklebys, rather than to the benevolent-minded, hearty, and gentle Cheerybles. We see what it is that makes the faithful and contented and simple Tim Linkinwaters rather than the degenerated Newman Noggsses.

It is the presence of the warm cheeriness, and the benevolent concern, and the respectful confidence and trustfulness, which, constituting the very atmosphere of their business, produces ideal employés. And, on the other hand, it is the mercenary spirit and the greed of the Ralph Nicklebys which produces clerks like Newman

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Noggs. The merchandise of such commerce as the Cheerybles is the exchange of mutual services and the mutual recognition of human values; its currency and media of exchange are in tokens of good-will, charity, and mutual aid, rather than in the competitive symbolism of current coins. And its dividends, are they not paid in human happiness?

In the Cheerybles there is no manifestation of that sort of philanthropy which makes it a moral luxury dependent upon the existence of the poor and needy. Here, benevolence is not, as it so often is, the mere revel of self-indulgent gift-giving to a degenerate recipient-class, with all the Quales and Honeythunders, battenning upon it. Dickens saw the snare of charity as well in its public as in its private aspects. "The Begging Letter Writer" emphasises the demoralising effect of haphazard and careless charity; and that too, both upon the giver and the receiver.

In Dickens's day there were many, and presumably in our own there are not less, who stare open-mouthed at ostentatious benevolence, and fall down and worship it as having the glow and graces of priceless virtues! Yet true charity is hard to accomplish and equally difficult to perceive: it does good by stealth. It is not a thing of the platform or the newspaper, and is something more than mere cheque-signing and money-collecting—more even than doles of cash, coals, or blankets.

The Cheerybles did not find it easy to dispense the solid charities of their sane, warm, and perceptive hearts. Nicholas Nickleby's salary was to be £120 a year, but this was not all. There was a cottage for his mother and sister, which must be let to them, either for something under the real rent, or for nothing at all; and the latter was certainly to be preferred. "For nothing at all," said brother Ned. "We are rich and should be

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“ ‘ashamed to touch the rent under such circumstances
“ ‘as these. . . . For nothing at all, my dear brother,
“ ‘for nothing at all.’ ‘Perhaps it would better to say
“ ‘something, brother Ned,’ suggested the other mildly,
“ ‘it would help to preserve habits of frugality, you
“ ‘know, and remove any painful sense of overwhelming
“ ‘obligations. . . . And I might secretly advance a
“ ‘small loan towards the little furniture, and you might
“ ‘secretly advance another small loan, brother Ned; and
“ ‘if we find them doing well—as we shall; there is no
“ ‘fear, no fear—we can change the loans into gifts—
“ ‘carefully brother Ned, and by degrees, and without
“ ‘pressing upon them too much; what do you say,
“ ‘brother Ned.’ ”

Always the same trembling eagerness to relieve suffering, to save useful lives from the ever-yawning abyss of poverty and degradation, to re-establish comfort and happiness, to reward service fully and completely. And always the same care not to hurt the natural feelings of human dignity and self-reliance, nor to affront the susceptibilities of proper and saving self-respect. Always there was the same reverence and gratitude for the privileges they enjoyed in their ministrations to the distressed. Like the generous-hearted Mr. and Mrs. Boffin of *Our Mutual Friend*, they ever remembered their own days of poverty and struggle; and knew instinctively, and by natural sympathy, the fine humanities of administrative philanthropy. And yet, as Nicholas once said to himself (when witnessing amid the humour and jollity of an annual dinner, given by the Cheerybles, the grave and reverent toast, “The Memory of our Mother”), “Good God, and there are scores of people of their own station, “knowing all this, and twenty thousand times more, who “wouldn’t ask these men to dinner because they eat “with their knives and never went to school.”

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None can say that the Cheeryble brothers are delineations of mere buoyant and self-indulgent good-will, giving and bestowing for the mere love of ostentatious benignance. Their liberal munificence was bestowed with all the care and prudence which private and intimate acquaintance can bring: it sprang from the inward desire and good-will to minister personally to the distressed, and was not publicly and flauntingly flung broadcast to the groundlings in the spirit of easy patronage or vain ostentation. Dickens tells us in his Preface to *Nicholas Nickleby* what of course was pretty obvious, namely, that the Cheerybles were drawn from life. "It is remarkable," he says, "that what we call the world, which is so very credulous in what professes to be true, is most incredulous in what professes to be imaginary; and that while, every day in real life, it will allow in one man no blemishes, and in another no virtues, it will seldom admit a very strongly-marked character, either good or bad, in a fictitious narrative, to be within the limits of probability. But those who take an interest in this tale will be glad to learn that the Brothers Cheeryble live; that their liberal charity, their singleness of heart, their noble nature and their unbounded benevolence are no creation of the author's brain; but are prompting every day (and oftenest by stealth) some munificent and generous deed in that town in which they are the pride and honour."

Dickens frequently brings us sharply to many disturbing reflections. Can it be that all the finer feelings of generosity and charity are dependent for their existence and their exercise, upon a distressed section of our common humanity? Is it necessary to cultivate the spirit of charity literally in the soul of misery and degradation? Are all the liberal virtues merely the outcome of the necessary existence of poverty? Is the prevalence

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of a vast amount of poverty and its associated evils necessary for the sustenance, the glow, and the grace of private virtues? Are there no new fountains of generosity and good-will other than those rooted in the existence of the poor? Is the quality of social and personal service limited by mere cash-collecting and cheque-signing? Most of us hope that the extension of wise and beneficent government will very seriously limit the extension and exercise of the private sentiments of pity, sympathy, and benevolence. If not, then, indeed, is charity a moral luxury for the rich, and poverty and immorality are never to be eliminated from the social order. It may be that out of our poverty we have built our economics; that out of our failure and travail we have constructed wise governments; that out of our crime, insanity, and disease, whole sciences have sprung. But while all knowledge and all morality may have some genesis in, or some relation to, the evil and the abnormal in life, it surely is not necessary or inevitable that the wrong, the evil, and the ugly should be merely conditions to favour a monopoly in private righteousness and ostentatious generosity!

Dickens everywhere shows us the narrowness of such thinking. The function of true and wise philanthropy extends its outlook beyond the individual to the mass. Certain forms of charity are but the unhealthy expression of wealth, only half-conscious of the real root of the evil. And the ministry by proxy is its most vicious aspect, but, as a particularly keen observer has remarked, "it is guaranteed neither to soil the hands nor offend the nostrils."

In point of fact, delegated charity is but the counterpart of an economic *régime* which permits extremes of wealth and poverty. So that at both ends there is moral and physical trouble—the rich mainly idle and luxurious,

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the poor mainly vicious and overworked. Benevolence becomes merely a sub-conscious and haphazard method of preserving the body-politic, with the poor at the bottom, always maintained at the outer margin of the *vita minima*, below which they become a physical and social menace. As a modern writer has put it, "Poverty is the result of an unconscious society evolving through experimental processes in the endeavour to find the minimum amount of food upon which the poor may be enabled to live and work amongst us." Dickens, of course, did not see as deeply into economic causes as we do to-day; but undoubtedly he saw that there were questions of poverty and degradation which the ordinary conceptions of philanthropy left quite untouched. The best illustration, perhaps, is the case of Poor Jo, the object of the beneficent ministrations of John Jarndyce and Esther. Jo is the immediate object of their charity; but he stands for the symbol and product of the foul and festering slums of London, and the word pictures of the places where he is to be found are fearsome in their intensity. They horrify us; "He is not one of Mrs. Pardiggle's Tockahopo Indians; he is not one of Mrs. Jellyby's lambs, being wholly unconnected with Borrioboola-Gha; he is not softened by distance and unfamiliarity; he is not a genuine foreign-grown savage, he is the ordinary home-made article. Dirty, ugly, disagreeable to all the senses, in body a common creature of the common streets, only in soul a heathen. Homely filth begrimes him, homely parasites devour him, homely sores are in him, homely rags are on him; native ignorance, the growth of English soil and climate, sinks his immortal nature lower than the beasts that perish. Stand forth, Jo, in uncompromising colours! From the sole of thy foot to the crown of thy head, there is nothing interesting about thee! . . .

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“ It is surely a strange fact, that in the heart of the
“ civilised world this creature in human form should be
“ more difficult to dispose of than an unknown dog.”

Dickens knew these people from first-hand knowledge; he knew also the places where they were born and bred. The opening of the preceding chapter in *Bleak House* furnishes a description of the slum which was the habitation of Jo, and also shows Dickens's full knowledge of the moral and physical infection which spreads from these foul places. Chapter XLVII. of *Dombey and Son* sets forth how the West is infected by the East, by the moral as well as the physical pestilence conveyed in the very air we breathe. Always, and infallibly, does Dickens point to the greater issues of the poverty problem which should properly move our philanthropic activities to the greater and higher purpose of national as well as individual effort. The wonder is that Dickens did not give us a social reformer amongst his characters. No writer more powerfully delineated the humanitarian spirit; no writer was more intimately acquainted with the conditions which call for its utmost efforts; and no writer was more emphatic and clear in the direct statement of his views and opinions, as may be demonstrated by even a casual glance at the *Miscellaneous Papers*.

For a pointer to the large issues in the philanthropic question, we turn to “ Nobody's Story ” in the *Reprinted Pieces*. This is fine and incisive satire on philanthropy gone wrong. It is an appeal in the guise of satirical allegory to the Bigwig Family for a wider and more enlightened beneficence. “ Nobody ” is the symbol for Legion. He is the narrator of a story of the stately and noisy household of Bigwigs who profess to be humanitarians. They patronise the working class—“ Nobody.” They do nothing but blow their own trumpets, and, like the Pardiggles, exalt their class, erect idols and statues

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for hero-worship to the utter neglect of the true function of philanthropy. They moreover make exalted or quarrelsome speeches. They distribute fatuous pamphlets. They likewise sort themselves out into antagonising factions and waste their energies in seeking differences instead of common grounds of agreement and common methods of action. "Nobody" stares in wonder and mystification and goes on with his work. He is finally stung into an appeal to the Bigwig classes on behalf of his own order for proper instruction, rational amusements as the means of preventing depravity, drunkenness, crime, and debauchery. "The story of Nobody is the story of the rank and file of the earth," brigaded and officered for the indulgence of hectoring and regulating majors, captains, and lieutenants, and other fussy philanthropists. These Nobodies plod on from day to day to preserve their lives and those of their families, and to maintain such respectability as may be possible. "They bear their share of the battles; they have their part in the victory; they fall, they leave no name, but in the mass. The march of the proudest of us leads to the dusty way by which they go. Oh! let us think of them this year at the Christmas fire, and not forget them when it is burnt out."

In the *Christmas Stories* is focussed the spirit and the gospel of good-will in all its full power and epiphany. These books are redolent of the pure atmosphere of cosiness, festivity, and humanity. The very fog is jolly. The frost and the cold nips us into buoyancy and crisp heartiness; it glints with glee, and moves us to cheeriness. And philanthropists, good and bad, stalk through the pictures with all Dickens's love and power of satiric contrast. These stories are all charity sermons of the most convincing and moving power. The *Christmas Carol* is a transformation scene: it is both pantomimic

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and spiritual. It is the story of the transformation of the Mercenary Spirit into the Châritable Spirit—not the cold, frosty fiction of listless and mechanical gift-giving, but the charity which is the chiefest of the virtues, the jolly, hearty, laughing, romping, uplifting thing. Scrooge is literally “converted.” He is converted in all the “salvation” sense of the word. He is at first spiritually drunk on the very wine of good-will. He is literally born again, and becomes as a little child. And his conversion is brought about under the reminiscent power of the love, the laughter, the simple romance of childhood—the simple heartiness of his youthful days. The spirit of true charity and good-will makes, out of the mean, “squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, “clutching, covetous old sinner,” a man as buoyant and happy and generous as two Cheerybles.

While *The Chimes* has all the qualities for which Dickens is noted, it is nevertheless a stern and scornful thrust at the canting, coarse charity which patronises the thrifty and faithful poor and hustles them into a grandmotherly fold like dumb sheep. Dickens detested the stately, supercilious beneficence of the Alderman Cutes and Sir Joseph Bowleys. While they pride themselves on being the “poor man’s friend and father,” they bully them with all sorts of smug advice about their shortcomings, extravagances, and indulgences. They marry too early; they waste food in ignorance of proper cooking and hygiene; they beget too many children; they are given to treating and intemperance. All these things, and many more, the Bowleys and Cutes decide must be “put down.” Amongst other things to be put down is the nonsense about want, and the cant about starvation; all young mothers, ill-clad children, early marriages, illegitimates, young couples, imbeciles, suicides, and the

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eating of tripe. The poor cannot do anything right: they have got to be *put* right, and, above all, *put down*.

Against all this benevolent bullying we are shown the poor in all the reality of their patient striving, their meek and faithful Trotty Vecks, their sympathetic Megs, their unfortunate Lilians. While the cloud of hectoring admonition and hortation, and of blinkered misrepresentation and misunderstanding hangs about them, we see them steadily going their way with their simple homely affections, their thrifts, their self-reliance, their little bursts of jollity, and their sympathy for each other. Dickens understood the poor. And in *The Chimes* he does not merely vindicate them, he becomes one of them, speaking with their voices, living in the humble reality of their lives, and now and again uttering the secret murmurs and angers of their hearts. The self-vindication of your hunted Will Ferns before your Honourable Boards of Professional Philanthropists shows how the cloud of abuse showered on the poor produces at some time or other its crop of desperate, struggling characters, who at bottom only desire to live in peace and security and just understanding "like one of the Almighty's "creatures."

"It is the duty of a man," says Dickens in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, "to be just before he is generous"; and again in *The Chimes* "we must trust and hope, and "neither doubt ourselves nor doubt the good in one "another." The Bowleys and the Cutes are blind with booby ignorance of the real life and character of the poor, and their philanthropy is, in consequence, all awry with its inflated and almost comic fatuities and obliquities.

"Hug himself the creature may:
What he hugs is loathed decay."

Standing always in convincing contrast to such mistaken and misdirected charity, are the personal and

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humane benevolences of innumerable personages: the patient and sane humanities of the Reverend Frank Milveys with the Betty Higdens, the Toodleses, the Sloppys; and the plagues like the portentous old parishioner Mrs. Sprodgkin; the homely kindnesses of the noble-souled Mr. Peggotty, who took in to his quaint old boat-hut on Yarmouth Denes, the lone and forlorn Mrs. Gummidge and his nephew Ham, and rescued the unfortunate Martha Endell; the befriending of Sam Weller, Alfred Jingle, and Job Trotter, and many others, by the good-humoured and benevolent Pickwick; the rescue of the murderer and outcast by the Benevolent Clergyman of Dingley Dell; the cosy hospitality and simple good-will of Captain Cuttle who protects and befriends Florence Dombey in her extremity, and who finds a home and gives employment to Rob the charity boy, a vicious and ungrateful product of an institution called the Charitable Grinders. Then there is Mr. Garland who befriended Kit Nubbles, and Mr. Brownlow who took the poor workhouse wanderer, Oliver Twist, into his home, treated him kindly, and rescued him from the powers of evil which assailed him. These, and a host of others, make a long line of immortal examplars of the true Dickensian philanthropy.

In another chapter has been pointed out the generous words of Thackeray respecting Dickens's whole work. In the course of a lecture which he once delivered upon his confrère, he said: "As for the charities of Mr. Dickens, multiplied kindness which he has conferred upon us all; upon our children; upon people educated and uneducated; upon the myriads here and at home, who speak our common tongue; have not you, have not I, all of us reason to be thankful to this kind friend who soothed and charmed so many hours, brought

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“pleasure and sweet laughter to so many homes; made
“such multitudes of children happy; endowed us with
“such a sweet store of gracious thoughts, fair fancies, soft
“sympathies, hearty enjoyments? There are creations of
“Mr. Dickens which seem to me to rank as personal
“benefits; figures so delightful that one feels happier and
“better for knowing them, as one does for being brought
“into the society of very good men and women. The
“atmosphere in which these people lived is wholesome to
“breathe in; you feel that to be allowed to speak to them
“is a personal kindness; you come away the better for
“your contact with them; your hands feel cleaner from
“having the privilege of shaking theirs. Was there
“ever a better charity sermon preached in the world than
“*Christmas Carol*? I believe it occasioned immense
“hospitality throughout England; was the means of
“lighting up hundreds of kind fires at Xmas time;
“caused a wonderful outpouring of Xmas good feeling;
“of Xmas punch-brewing; an awful slaughter of Xmas
“turkeys, and roasting and basting of Xmas beef.”

There is a great deal in the philanthropy of our own day which might profit by Dickens's teachings—teachings both of precept and example. His personal charities were characterised by care and prudence. What would he think of the enormous waste of labour and cash in the organising of some of the present-day charities? Think of the balls, concerts, bazaars, fêtes, and entertainments of all kinds, which churches, leaders of fashion and so-called “honorary organisers” promote nowadays upon the tenuous excuse of charity! Many of these are mere debauches of dress and luxurious make-believe. And some are mere Bacchanalian revels in French frivolities, and all-night riots in voluptuous pleasures.

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With what stinging satire would he have commented upon such an incident as was recorded in *The Observer* as recently as March 7th, 1915:—

THE PHARISEES.

NO RELIEF FOR LITTLE CRIPPLE BECAUSE OF FATHER'S "MORALS."

Some strange disclosures as to the methods adopted by charity organisations in dealing with applicants for assistance were made at a meeting of the Wandsworth Board of Guardians.

It was stated that a little girl had applied to the Invalid Children's Aid Association for a surgical boot and a splinter, and had been refused on the grounds that the committee were not satisfied with the moral character of her father.

The father had been for twelve years in the Royal Garrison Artillery, and was invalided out with an excellent character, but the society had ascertained that some years ago, *before the child was born*, he had committed a moral offence.

Mr. A. Winfield said the only fault of the man was that some years ago he *married* the mother of his first child born before the marriage.

Dickens to-day would have found ample materials and characters innumerable for satirical animadversion upon the charity-mongering of the present period. But, alas!—

"His soul has gone back to whence it came
And no one answers to the name."

Yet the calls to genuine altruistic solicitude are universal. Notwithstanding the doubtful forms they frequently assume, they are astonishing to contemplate. It is surprising that in a Christian and a democratic country the propaganda of need should have so enormously multiplied since Dickens's days. It provides material for the most serious reflection both for the philosopher and the philanthropist—to say nothing of the humourist and satirist. There must be some serious moral hiatus in our ethical standards, some awful vacuum in our codes of righteousness, some serious

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blemish in our power to realise our ideals. There is still a yawning abyss of failure, of poverty, of vice, of fierce struggle for mere existence. Morbid humours of the competitive strife assail us on every hand. Modern society is a reservoir of seething resentments; a slumbering volcano of social sub-anger. In it all the choicest spirits and noblest natures become obsessed with the urgency to subserve their own survival in what are seen to be fields of perpetual antagonisms. All these elements of competitive and self-regarding concerns of the common life become refracted upon the political plane; and that vast sum of human interests which we call Politics becomes in our day a perfect maelstrom of bitternesses—the stalking place where modern man resolves all his problems of struggle into strange semblances of mutual justice, mutual adaptation and compromise, only after humanity has suffered many lacerations in the strife.

John Ruskin has said that “In a society where competition is the main incentive to life and activity, only one question needs to be settled, which in times of peace is determined mostly by fraud, in times of war by force—and that question is, ‘*Who is to die?*’” It would seem that it is just this thought which becomes a steely point of light beaming through the starless darkness. The stern rigor and discipline of the evolutionary law are bringing us more or less blindly to the idea that we must needs foster, develop, and preserve life, rather than sacrifice it in internecine struggle. Hence we see so many manifestations of the attempts—some wise, some futile—to forestall it. We thirst for a new order and a new unity, and thus by good and bad remedies we seek to establish it. We are commencing a struggle *against* the struggle for existence, as the late Lord Onslow once declared in a speech on Imperial matters. Huxley, too, happily expressed the same thought when comparing

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the ethical with the primitive society, when he said that the evolutionary struggle of man is not so much for the survival of the fittest as *for the fitting of as many as possible to survive*. There is the *raison d'être* of the divers, restless labours of charity. Men and women are seeking relief and fresh energy in combination for mutual service. In every phase of our social life we find abundant evidence of the new forces at work in our midst, and we are seeking to apply—now in one way, now in another—remedies and social service that shall heal the lacerations of humanity. This is the meaning of that word Progress which is the inspiration and watchword of so many different activities. After all, the true philanthropist is the earnest social reformer.

As Ruskin well said, “to give alms is nothing unless you give thought also; and therefore it is written, not ‘blessed is he that *feedeth* the poor,’ but ‘blessed is he that *considereth* the poor.’”

CHAPTER X.

THE HYPOCRITES AND HUMBUGS.

“There are some men, who living with the one object of enriching themselves, no matter by what means, and being perfectly conscious of the baseness and rascality of the means which they will use every day towards this end, affect nevertheless—even to themselves—a high tone of moral rectitude and shake their heads and sigh over the depravity of the world. Some of the craftiest scoundrels that ever walked this earth, or, rather, . . . that ever crawled and crept through life by its dirtiest and narrowest ways, will gravely jot down in diaries the events of every day and keep a regular debtor and creditor account with Heaven which shall always show a floating balance in their own favour.”

Nicholas Nickleby. Chap. XLIV.

THE genius of Dickens, supreme in its intimacy with the fundamental qualities of English character, is never more arrestive than in his studies of hypocrisy. Romantic, adventurous, and kindly, we are not as a nation mentally alert; we do not desire to know the truth. We prefer a plaster of platitudes to the X-rays of investigation. It is supremely difficult for the Englishman to separate things external from things eternal; and the suggestion that a man in footman's livery has a mathematical genius would seem not so much exaggerated as profane.

Chadband, in the homely garb of a greengrocer, expatiating on the succulence of his spring onions, discussing the symbolism of a new potato, would be eminently amusing and quite innocuous; but Chadband, in the habit of his calling, suggests a spiritual significance which, rather than trouble to investigate, we accept. The apostle of “terewth” has been recognised long ago as an archetype of imposture, but the

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importance of Dickens's selection is liable to pass unnoticed.

That ministers of religion could and did commit crimes, English middle-class society at that time would have admitted; that some of them used the fervour of religious expression for dishonourable ends is a conclusion that, by the majority of people, would have been hotly resented.

The lineal descendants of "Praise-God Barebones," Chadband, and Stiggins, came into their inheritance through the genius of the man who, realising the dangerous influence of shibboleths in the English mind, carried his campaign of ridicule into the very citadel of Nonconformity.

To have lampooned a minister of religion needed courage of a rare order; to have shaken the influence of the phrasemonger was an achievement not easily excelled. The power of the phrase over the English people is a tyrannical one. A politician's catch-word will win an election; a financier's flowing periods will raise money for a proposition essentially unsound. It was Dickens who first rent the garment of eloquence, showing the dry bones of hypocrisy beneath, and his conception of the oratorical "shepherd" is a satire whose fine point is often overlooked in the exquisite humour of its treatment.

Chadband, giving thanks for "corn and wine and oil," is only less great than Chadband deploring the sinful nature of man.

"My friends," says he, "what is this which we now behold as being spread before us? Refreshment. Do we need refreshment, then, my friends? We do. And why do we need refreshment, my friends? Because we are mortal, because we are but sinful, because we are but of this earth, because we are not of the air. Can we fly, my

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friends. We cannot. Why can we not fly, my friends? . . . Is it because we are calculated to walk? It is. Could we walk, my friends, without strength? We could not. What should we do without strength, my friends? Our legs would refuse to bear us, our knees would double up, our ankles would turn over, and we should come to the ground. Then from whence, my friends, in a human point of view, do we derive the strength that is necessary to our limbs? Is it," says Chadband, glancing over the table, "from bread in various forms, from butter which is churned from the milk which is yielded untoe us by the cow, from the eggs which are laid by the fowl, from ham, from tongue, from sausage, and from such like? It is. Then let us partake of the good things which are set before us."

Chadband, admitting his share of mortal frailty, is an eternal source of joy, and echoes of his mellifluous confession still permeate evangelical consciousness to-day.

"My friends," says Mr. Chadband, with his persecuted chin folding itself into its fat smile again as he looks round. "It is right that I should be humbled, it is right that I should be tried, it is right that I should be mortified, it is right that I should be corrected. I stumbled, on Sabbath last, when I thought with pride of my three hours' improving. The account is now favourably balanced; my Creditor has accepted a composition. Oh, let us be joyful, joyful! Oh, let us be joyful!"

But the greatest moment, even of Chadband's eloquence, is reached when he plunges into philosophy and in the spirit of Pontius Pilate and the New Theology, discourses on the eternal verities.

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“ If the master of this house was to go forth into the city, and there see an eel, and was to come back and was to call untoe him the mistress of this house, and was to say, ‘ Sarah, rejoice with me, for I have seen an elephant!’ Would *that* be terewth? . . . Or put it, my juvenile friends, that he saw an elephant, and returning, said, ‘ Lo! the city is barren, I have seen but an eel!’ Would *that* be terewth? ”

It has always been thought that Honeythunder, the platform philanthropist, was the complement of Chadband. His was the ostentatious hypocrisy which, as Dickens said, awakens disgust. It was at the memorable interview with Canon Crisparkle, after the arrest of Neville Landless, that he gave his incomparable address on murder.

“ ‘ Murder!’ proceeded Mr. Honeythunder, in a kind of boisterous reverie, with his platform-folding of his arms, and his platform-nod of abhorrent reflection after each short sentiment of a word. ‘ Bloodshed! Abel! Cain!! I hold no terms with Cain. I repudiate with a shudder the red hand when it is offered me. . . . The Commandments say, no murder. *NO* murder, sir!’ proceeded Mr. Honeythunder, platformly pausing as if he took Mr. Crisparkle to task for having distinctly asserted that they said: ‘ You may do a little murder, and then leave off.’ ”

Honeythunder seems to link up Chadband with Stiggins, and a fitting companion for them both is the Revd. Melchisedeck Howler in *Dombey and Son*, who announced that the world would be destroyed “ that day two years,” and who consequently opened a “ front parlour for the reception of ladies and gentlemen of the ranting persuasion, upon whom, on the first occasion of

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their assemblage," the admonition of the reverend gentleman had anything but its intended effect.

A melancholy manner and a persistent denunciation of the carnal enjoyments of other people still impress the Englishman who is by nature easy-going and disinclined to think for himself. It is indeed the glibness of Stiggins and his familiarity with the Almighty that make him so grave a menace, and it is a menace, moreover, that we are in danger of overlooking to-day. For though Stiggins has changed his profession, and has forsaken the pulpit for so-called "social reform," his activities are none the less dangerous, and his influence none the less insidiously malign. In Dickens's day, Stiggins openly avowed his intentions; in modern times he hides his aims under the cloak of one or another of the "isms," and in place of tracts directing the attention of the theatregoer to the proximity of a bottomless pit with attendant devils, he manages to issue reports showing how to curtail the freedom of the poor and confiscate their liberties.

But as Dickens knew, hypocrisy, apart from temples and high priests, claims its shrines in every phase of English life. He has given us the polished hypocrisy of Sir John Chester, the aristocrat; he has shown us also the mean deceit of Skimpole, the charming Bohemian, and the blatant chicanery of Montague Tigg, as well as the evil slyness of Carker and the servility of Jonas Chuzzlewit.

In his story, *Hunted Down*, too, he presented us with Mr. Julius Slinkton, a person, smooth, well-bred, agreeable, who professes to be on the point "of going into holy orders," but who is in reality a consummate hypocrite and scoundrel. It will be recalled that he effected an insurance for two thousand pounds on the life of Mr. Alfred Beckwith and then attempted to poison him in

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order to procure the money, but, being foiled in his object, and on the point of arrest, he, like another consummate financier, destroyed himself. A lesser figure, although as great a hypocrite, was Blackey, the loathsome mendicant (*Reprinted Pieces*), who for twenty-five years stood soliciting charity near London Bridge, and actually painted his skin to represent disease, the more readily to elicit public sympathy and private alms.

The stronghold of the vice of hypocrisy, however, is in the middle-classes, and of the middle-class hypocrite Dickens has drawn in Pecksniff and his daughters a type that is eternal. Pecksniff is, indeed, so sleek and consummate a hypocrite that one is tempted at times to believe he imposed upon himself! Pecksniff, exploring his amiable sentiments and bland smile to the disadvantage of society, arrests the imagination. Pecksniff, cheating his own soul, exploiting his hypocrisy at the expense of his ultimate salvation, is a spectacle that seals the vision. For the final punishment of the hypocrite is the loss of the knowledge of good and evil; the loss of the power to distinguish truth from a lie; the inability, in a word, to recognise hell from heaven. And the curious psychological fact is, as Dickens points out, that the more men of the Pecksniff characteristics are discovered in their hypocrisy, the more they practise it.

“Let him be discomfited in one quarter, and he recompensed and refreshed himself by carrying the war into another. If his workings and windings were detected by A, so much the greater reason was there for practising without loss of time on B, if it were only to keep his hand in.”

Possibly, in his fatuity, the man might have believed in his own sensibilities; such at least is the impression suggested in the memorable scene where he dismisses simple, honest Tom Pinch.

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“ ‘ I will not say,’ cried Mr. Pecksniff, shedding tears, ‘ what a blow this is. I will not say how much it tries me; how it works upon my nature; how it grates upon my feelings. I do not care for that. I can endure as well as another man. But what I have to hope, and what you have to hope, Mr. Pinch (otherwise a great responsibility rests upon you), is, that this deception may not alter my ideas of humanity; that it may not impair my freshness, or contract, if I may use the expression, my Pinions. I hope it will not; I don’t think it will. It may be a comfort to you, if not now, at some future time, to know that I shall endeavour not to think the worse of my fellow-creatures in general for what has passed between us. Farewell!’ ”

For a moment the veil of hypocrisy is lifted, and Pecksniff has a glimpse of what he really is. It is Mary Graham who contrives the miracle.

“ Gallantry in its true sense is supposed to ennoble and dignify a man, and love has shed refinements on innumerable Cymons. But Mr. Pecksniff, perhaps because to one of his exalted nature these were mere grossnesses, certainly did not appear to any unusual advantage now that he was left alone. On the contrary, he seemed to be shrunk and reduced, to be trying to hide himself within himself, and to be wretched at not having the power to do it. His shoes looked too large; his sleeves too long; his hair looked too limp, his features looked too mean; his exposed throat looked as if a halter would have done it good. For a minute or two, in fact, he was hot, and pale, and mean, and shy, and slinking, and consequently not at all Pecksniffian. But, after that, he recovered himself and went home with as beneficent an air as if he had been the High Priest of the summer weather.”

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The detail of the "exposed throat" has always seemed to be a master-stroke. It exactly typifies the man. One can visualise him elaborately struggling with emotion, as one sees many of our social apostles, also with "exposed throats" to-day.

The moment of vision vouchsafed to Pecksniff never returns, and at the conclusion of the book he is left bound hand and foot with the shackles of hypocrisy.

" A drunken, squalid, begging-letter-writing man, called Pecksniff (with a shrewish daughter), haunts thee, Tom, and when he makes appeals to thee for cash, reminds thee that he built thy fortunes better than his own; and when he spends it, entertains the alehouse company with tales of thine ingratitude and his munificence towards thee once upon a time; and when he shows his elbows worn in holes and puts his soleless shoes up on a bench, and begs his auditors look there, while thou art comfortably housed and clothed. All known to thee, and yet all borne with, Tom! "

Uriah Heep, by many regarded as one of Dickens's most successful hypocrites, was created to show the distinction between the man who for a set purpose plays a part, never deceiving himself as to his real intentions, and the man, on the other hand, who in the very essence of things is an arch liar and deceiver. Heep belongs to the first category, and is neither so repulsive as Pecksniff—nor yet so English. His dogged determination, his unscrupulous audacity, the cynicism of his attitude when he is unmasked, suggest a Latin type. Cruel, treacherous, and ungrateful, Uriah never for a moment believed in his " 'umbleness." It is his ambition and desire so to shape his life that in the ultimate he can throw off the cloak of his humiliation and emerge a triumphant, if sardonic, figure.

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Phrases never imposed on Heep. The truisms that are the stock-in-trade of professional philanthropists, politicians, and swindlers, were held by him at surface value only. They held no balm for him, and in his downfall he disdained them.

Martin Chuzzlewit contains a unique collection of hypocrites of a more modern type than Pecksniff. The proclamations of the Societies for the Regeneration of Mankind are among Dickens's finest satires, and the circular of the Watertoast Association, which sympathised with a certain public man in Ireland "who held a contest upon certain points in England," is unique.

"'In Freedom's name, sir—holy Freedom—I address you. In Freedom's name, I send herewith a contribution to the funds of your society. In Freedom's name, sir, I advert with indignation and disgust to that accursed animal, with gore-stained whiskers, whose rampant cruelty and fiery lust have ever been a scourge, a torment to the world. The naked visitors to Crusoe's Island, sir; the flying wives of Peter Wilkins; the fruit-smear'd children of the tangled bush; nay, even the men of large stature, anciently bred in the mining districts of Cornwall; alike bear witness to its savage nature. Where, sir, are the Cormorans, the Blunderbores, the Great Feefofums, named in history? All, all exterminated by its destroying hand.

"' I allude, sir, to the British lion.

"' Devoted, mind and body, heart and soul, to Freedom, sir—to Freedom, blessed solace to the snail upon the cellar-door, the oyster in his pearly bed, the still mite in his home of cheese, the very winkle of your country in his shelly lair—in her unsullied name, we offer you our sympathy. Oh, sir, in this our cherished and our happy land, her

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fires burn bright and clear and smokeless; once lighted up in yours, the lion shall be roasted whole.

I am, sir, in Freedom's name,

Your affectionate friend

and faithful Sympathiser,

“ ‘CYRUS CHOKE, General, U.S.M.’ ”

It will be remembered that immediately after reading this great effort, that high thinker, General Cyrus Choke, discovered that the public man in question was a reptile in disguise.

“It happened that just as the General began to read this letter the railroad train arrived, bringing a new mail from England, and a packet had been handed in to the Secretary, which, during its perusal and the frequent cheerings in homage to freedom, he had opened. Now, its contents disturbed him very much, and the moment the General sat down he hurried to his side and placed in his hand a letter and several printed extracts from English newspapers, to which, in a state of infinite excitement, he called his immediate attention.

“The General, being greatly heated by his own composition, was in a fit state to receive any inflammable influence, but he had no sooner possessed himself of the contents of these documents than a change came over his face, involving such a huge amount of choler and passion that the noisy course were silent in a moment in very wonder at the sight of him.

“ ‘My friends!’ cried the General, rising. ‘My friends and fellow-citizens, we have been mistaken in this man.’

“ ‘In what man?’ was the cry.

“ ‘In this,’ panted the General, holding up the letter he had read aloud a few minutes before. ‘I

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find that he has been, and is, the advocate—consistent in it always, too—of nigger emancipation!’

“If anything beneath the sky be real, those Sons of Freedom would have pistolled, stabbed—in some way slain—that man by coward hands and murderous violence if he had stood among them at the time. The most confiding of their own countrymen would not have wagered then; no, nor would they ever peril one dung-hill straw upon the life of any man in such a strait. They tore the letter, cast the fragments in the air, trod down pieces as they fell, and yelled, and groaned, and hissed, till they could cry no longer.

“‘I shall move,’ said the General, when he could make himself heard, ‘that the Watertoast Association of United Sympathisers be immediately dissolved!’

“‘Down with it! Away with it! Don’t hear of it! Burn its records! Pull the room down! Blot it out of human memory!’”

That grotesque description would very nearly fit many of the meetings of to-day, where the conduct of certain “comrades” suspected of sympathy with rival associations is called in question. For the great stumbling block to hypocrisy is liberty of action, liberty of thought. Once let the individual examine and judge for himself, and the power of the phrase, which is the sceptre of the national failing, is broken. In a free society, as in a free parliament, the individual challenges the conclusions of his fellows and his leaders. The gag of the platitude can only be enforced in what Mr. Hilaire Belloc calls a Servile State. And the power that makes for the Servile State is, and must always be, hypocrisy.

There is a more subtle form of self-deception than that exploited by the Chadbands and the Stigginses and the

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Pecksniffs of this world. It is symbolic of a spiritual cowardice allied to a fierce indifference to pain; an outward suggestion that hides the inward shrinking from unpalatable fact. Dickens is not alone in dealing with this type. Ibsen, the symbolist of the North, showed us Gabriel Borkman, who lied to himself until, stifled beneath the oppression of falsehood, he staggered out into the fresh air and died from the impact of reality.

Miss Havisham, in a world peopled by hosts, living in a mirage of vain imaginings, was a spiritual hypocrite, and, like all hypocrites, enslaved those with whom she came into touch. Listen to this, one of the finest passages of warning and denunciation, in which the unhappy woman forced from her entrenchments of distorted facts, and diseased fancies, is compelled to face life as it really is.

“ She turned her face to me for the first time since she had averted it, and to my amazement, I may even say to my terror, dropped on her knees at my feet, with her folded hands raised to me in the manner in which, when her poor heart was young and fresh and whole, they must often have been raised to Heaven from her mother’s side.”

“ To see her, with her white hair and her worn face, kneeling at my feet, gave me a shock through all my frame. I entreated her to rise, and got my arms about her to help her up, but she only pressed that hand of mine which was nearest to her grasp and hung her head over it and wept. I had never seen her shed a tear before, and, in the hope that the relief might do her good, I bent over her without speaking. She was not kneeling now, but was down upon the ground.

“ ‘ Oh ! ’ she cried, despairingly. ‘ What have I done ! What have I done ! ’

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“I knew not how to answer, or how to comfort her. That she had done a grievous thing in taking an impressionable child to mould into the form that her wild resentment, spurned affection, and wounded pride found vengeance in, I knew full well. But that, in shutting out the light of day, she had shut out infinitely more, that, in seclusion, she had secluded herself from a thousand natural and healing influences; that her mind, brooding solitary, had grown diseased, as all minds do, and must, and will, that reverse the appointed order of their Maker; I knew equally well. And could I look upon her without compassion, seeing her punishment in the ruin she was, in her profound unfitness for this earth on which she was placed, in the vanity of sorrow which had become a master mania, like the vanity of penitence, the vanity of remorse, the vanity of unworthiness, and other monstrous vanities that have been curses in this world?”

That the art of Dickens is largely symbolic is a fact that cannot be over emphasised. Like Hawthorne and Ibsen, he is continually typifying spiritual forces. Quilp in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, whom Mr. G. K. Chesterton insists is the modern form of the mediæval devil, is every whit as symbolic as the “Rat Wife” in *Little Eyolf*, or the *Prophetic Portraits* of Hawthorne. *Twice Told Tales* is pregnant with the same suggestion of inevitable disaster that haunts the threshold of the sinister house in *Little Dorrit*, with the eerie noises and the shadowy figures of hate, wrong, and revenge. There in that place of gloom sat the unhappy woman who lied to the world, to her husband and to her own heart, sinister and evil as the house itself.

The most haunting figure in this gallery of hypocrites is Rosa Dartle, and she seems to be symbolic of all the

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women, who, hugging their wrongs to their hearts, have blistered their lips with lying words and seared their souls with cruel acts. Hers was a tortured mind whose agony could find no place of peace, whose fierce resentment possessed no healing tears; instinct with bitterness, unrest, and perpetual dissatisfaction. Years of duplicity, years of enslavement—enslavement to ideas, which in her heart she resented—had maimed her instincts, distorted her view, so that when at last in a frenzy of hate she breaks the bonds of hypocrisy, and speaks the truth, it is too late—too late even for repentance.

David Copperfield has called on Mrs. Steerforth to break the news of her son's death.

“‘Rosa,’ said Mrs. Steerforth, ‘come to me!’”

“She came, but with no sympathy or gentleness. Her eyes gleamed like fire as she confronted his mother and broke into a frightful laugh.

“‘Now,’ she said, ‘is your pride appeased, you mad woman? *Now*, has he made atonement to you—with his life, do you hear? His life!’”

“Mrs. Steerforth, falling back stiffly in her chair, and making no sound but a moan, cast her eyes upon her with a wild stare.

“‘Ay,’ cried Rosa, smiting herself passionately on the breast. ‘Look at me! Moan and groan, and look at me! Look here!’ striking the scar, ‘at your dead child’s handiwork! . . . Do you remember when he did this?’ she proceeded. ‘Do you remember when, in his inheritance of your nature and in your pampering of his pride and passion, he did this, and disfigured me for life? Look at me, marked with his high displeasure and moan and groan for what you made him!’”

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“ ‘Miss Dartle,’ I entreated her, ‘For Heaven’s sake——’

“ ‘I will speak!’ she said, turning on me with her lightning eyes. ‘Be silent you! Look at me, I say, proud mother of a proud false son! Moan for your nurture of him, moan for your corruption of him, moan for your loss of him, moan for mine . . . I tell you, I *will* speak to her. No power on earth should stop me while I was standing here. Have I been silent all these years, and shall I not speak now? I loved him better than you ever loved him.’”

From her frenzy of despair and reproach she falls to weeping and tending the broken woman.

She had then taken the impassive figure in her arms, and still upon her knees, weeping over it, kissing it, calling to it, rocking it to and fro upon her bosom like a child, and trying every tender means to rouse the dormant senses.

But her tenderness—like her wrath was overdue. The punishment of self-deception had fallen on her and she was utterly, tragically ineffective.

It is this conclusion that Dickens brings home to us with crushing force. It is not our vices that are our undoing, it is lack of the courage to admit them that destroys us.

The Dickens gallery of Hypocrites and Humbugs could easily be extended. Mr. Sapsea, in *Edwin Drood*, whose self-importance is colossal, should find a place in it; and there are also Montague Tigg, Mr. Merdle, and Veneering. Above all we should not lose sight of Mr. Casby and Pumblechook. The former is a humbug of the selfish, crafty impostor type, who poses as a benefactor to the world whilst grinding his tenants by proxy. His physiognomical expression seemed incarnate with benignity. No one was able to see where his wisdom, virtue or benignity were, but all seemed to be somewhere about him.

THE HYPOCRITES AND HUMBUGS.

Pumblehook, the well-to-do corn chandler, uncle to Joe Gargery, with "a mouth like a fish, dull, staring eyes, and sandy hair standing upright on his head; so that he looked as if he had been choked and had just come too," is a great creation of Dickens. Like the weathercock, his hypocrisy was made to suit all changes. He bullied poor Pip, preached at him, and discussed his character and prospects in the presence of Mrs. Joe Gargery, making the lad a spectacle of imbecility only to be equalled by himself. Then see how he changes when Pip comes into his "*Great Expectations*."

"'My dear friend,' said Mr. Pumblehook, taking me by both hands. . . . 'I give you joy of your good fortune. Well deserved, well deserved!'"

"This was coming to the point, and I thought it a sensible way of expressing himself.

"'To think,' said Mr. Pumblehook, after snorting admiration at me for some moments, 'that I should have been the humble instrument of leading up to this, is a proud reward.'

"I begged Mr. Pumblehook to remember that nothing was to be ever said or hinted on that point.

"'My dear young friend,' said Mr. Pumblehook, 'if you will allow me to call you so——'

"I murmured, 'Certainly,' and Mr. Pumblehook took me by both hands again, and communicated a movement to his waistcoat, which had an emotional appearance, though it was rather low down, 'My dear young friend, rely upon my doing my little all in your absence, by keeping the fact before the mind of Joseph—Joseph!' said Mr. Pumblehook, in the way of a compassionate adjuration. 'Joseph!! Joseph!!!' Thereupon he shook his head and tapped it, expressing his sense of deficiency in Joseph.

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“ ‘ But my dear young friend,’ said Mr. Pumblechook, ‘ you must be hungry, you must be exhausted. Be seated. Here is a chicken had round from The Boar; here is a tongue had round from The Boar; here’s one or two little things had round from The Boar that I hope you may not despise. But do I,’ said Mr. Pumblechook, getting up again the moment after he had sat down, ‘ see afore me him as I ever sported with in his times of happy infancy? And may I—*may* I—?’

“ This ‘ May I,’ meant ‘ might he shake hands,’ I consented, and he was fervent, and then sat down again.

“ ‘ Here is wine,’ said Mr. Pumblechook. ‘ Let us drink Thanks to fortune, and may she ever pick out her favourites with equal judgment! And yet I cannot,’ said Mr. Pumblechook getting up again, ‘ see afore me One—and likewise drink to One—with-out again expressing—May I—*may* I—?’

“ I said he might, and he shook hands with me again, and emptied his glass and turned it upside down.”

When Pip is reduced to poverty by the death of his patron, Mr. Pumblechook again changes his manner and conduct, becoming as ostentatiously compassionate and forgiving as he had been meanly servile in the time of Pip’s new prosperity.

“ ‘ Young man, I am sorry to see you brought low. But what else could be expected! What else could be expected! . . . This is him . . . as I have rode in my shay-cart. This is him as I have seen brought up by hand. This is him unto the sister of which I was uncle by marriage, as her name was Georgiana M’ria from her own mother, let him deny it if he can! . . . ’

THE HYPOCRITES AND HUMBUGS.

“ ‘Young man,’ said Pumblechook, screwing his head at me in the old fashion, ‘you air a going to Joseph. What does it matter to me, you ask me, where you air a going? I say to you, Sir, you air a going to Joseph. . . . Now . . . I will tell you what to say to Joseph . . . Says you, ‘Joseph, I have this day seen my earliest benefactor and the founder of my fortun’s. I will name no names, Joseph, but so they are pleased to call him up-town, and I have seen that man.’

“ ‘I swear I don’t see him here,’ said I.

“ ‘Say that likewise,’ retorted Pumblechook. ‘Say you said that, and even Joseph will probably betray surprise.’

“ ‘There you quite mistake him,’ said I. ‘I know better.’

“ ‘Says you,’ Pumblechook went on, ‘Joseph, I have seen that man, and that man bears you no malice, and bears me no malice. He knows your character, Joseph, and is well acquainted with your pig-headedness and ignorance; and he knows my character, Joseph, and he knows my want of gratioode. Yes, Joseph,’ says you,’ here Pumblechook shook his head and hand at me, ‘He knows my total deficiency of common human gratioode. *He* knows it, Joseph, as none can. *You* do not know it, Joseph, having no call to know it, but that man do.’

“ Windy donkey as he was, it really amazed me that he could have the face to talk thus to mine.

“ ‘Says you, Joseph, he gave me a little message which I will now repeat. It was, that in my being brought low, he saw the finger of Providence. He knowed that finger when he saw it, Joseph, and he saw it plain. It pintoed out this writing, Joseph. *Reward of ingratitooode to earliest benefactor, and founder of fortun’s.* But that man said that he did

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not repent of what he had done, Joseph. Not at all. It was right to do it, it was kind to do it, it was benevolent to do it, and he would do it again.' ”

Pumblechooks exist to-day in abundance. Dickens's creation is *par excellence* the father of them all.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PARSONS.

“So cheerful of spirit and guiltless of affectation as true Christianity ever is! I read more of the New Testament in the fresh frank face going up the village beside me, in five minutes than I have read in anathematizing discourses (albeit put to press with enormous flourishing of trumpets) in all my life. I heard more of the Sacred Book in the cordial voice that had nothing to say about its owner, than in all the would-be celestial pairs of bellows that have ever blown conceit at me.”

The Uncommercial Traveller. Chap. II.

INCREDIBLE as it may appear, there are still people in the world who assert that Charles Dickens deliberately libelled that excellent class of men who are trained to minister to our spiritual needs. A generation ago Nonconformity nursed a particular grievance against him on this account, and ever and anon in these days comes some fresh echo of the old lurking resentment. The reason, of course, is not far to seek. Dickens detested wholeheartedly and sincerely every phase of dissembling and dissimulating humanity. He abominated shams, whether of social convention, of politics, of Government, of society, or of religion. Against them at one time or another he launched his relentless sarcasm, his merciless ridicule, or his indignant invective. He pilloried types without compunction, and when he found humbug and cant masquerading under the guise of religion he did not hesitate to rebuke it; but to avow that he libelled devout or sincere men is sheer, unadulterated nonsense.

It is quite clear, of course, that Dickens simply loved to hold up to scorn and raillery certain weak forms of religious exercises, and the banalities of those who indulged in them; but although he revelled openly and

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sometimes boisterously in the fun of it, it seems that he never failed to handle his figures or his scenes in the truest spirit and with entirely good taste. He lays bare even the worst forms of meanness and Pharisaic piety with a healthy and robust lightheartedness as though to conceal the white-heat passion of his virile contempt surging underneath. Sometimes, when with unerring and sagacious vision he has penetrated the manœuvrings and wriggings of religious pretenders, we find him smilingly wondering how men can really play such antics, and, before we are really conscious of it, he has transmuted that smiling wonderment on our behalf into broad mirth, unconcealed hilarity, or side-splitting laughter. Our contempt, our repulsion, or our pity follows. But it has all been evoked without irreverence. There have been no direct or indirect allusions to religious doctrines; no use of terms or phrases which have any orthodox religious vogue or pious application. There has been no travesty of true religious sentiment. Muggleton, with its smug religion, may be shown to be held in solution by a mercenary and calculating spirit, but all offensiveness in its exposure is adroitly avoided.

We have frequently felt that Dickens exhibited an undue tenderness towards some of the so-called religious characters he portrayed, and that they are sometimes not given their due meed of punishment; their deserts have seemed to be foreshortened, and the sense of poetic justice is scarcely satisfied. But then one has to remember that it was Dickens's almost invariable mood to deal sympathetically with even the worst forms of vice and evil; he seemed constantly to discern those deeper causes which produced evil, and he held them to be beyond the entire accountability of the individual. As in the case of the poor whom he loved with the devotion of a life's service, he handles all human frailties as part

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of that mystery of evil which seems to baffle all our civilisation and all our knowledge.

So that whilst Dickens, here and there, appears severe in his handling of religious life and character, it is quite easy to perceive that temperamentally he is sympathetic with all true religious and moral ministrations. If proof be needed, it is best forthcoming in that earnest letter which he sent to his youngest son just before he left home to join his brother in Australia :—

“ Never take a mean advantage of any one in any transaction, and never be hard upon people who are in your power. Try to do to others as you would have them do to you, and do not be discouraged if they fail sometimes. It is much better for you that they should fail in obeying the greatest rule laid down by Our Saviour than that you should. I put a New Testament among your books for the very same reasons, and with the very same hopes, that made me write an easy account of it for you when you were a little child. Because it is the best Book that ever was, or will be, known in the world, and because it teaches you the best lessons by which any human creature, who tries to be truthful and faithful to duty, can possibly be guided. As your brothers have gone away, one by one, I have written to each such words as I am now writing to you, and have entreated them all to guide themselves by this Book, putting aside the interpretations and inventions of man. You will remember that you have never at home been harrassed about religious observances, or mere formalities. I have always been anxious not to weary my children with such things before they are old enough to form opinions respecting them. You will therefore understand the better that I now most solemnly impress upon you the

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truth and beauty of the Christian religion, as it came from Christ Himself, and the impossibility of your going far wrong if you humbly but heartily respect it. Only one thing more on this head. The more we are in earnest as to feeling it, the less we are disposed to hold forth about it."

Clearly, a man who held deep-rooted convictions of this character could not fail to discern all those *nuances* of the spiritual character of the parson which make for righteousness, and which constitute a real and true ministry to the poor and the degraded.

That very early in life he was a keen observer of religious life and work may be seen in his sketch of the curate—a mild and inoffensive piece of pleasantry in the second *Sketch* by "Boz." But perhaps the best, most complete, and most sympathetic portrayal of a Christian minister in personal and intimate relation with his people is the portrait of the Rev. Frank Milvey. He is a young curate of the type that is thoroughly hard-worked and wretchedly underpaid in spite of his expensive education. Like the Rev. Horace Crewler, in *David Copperfield*, he has a large family: his wife is an ideal clergyman's wife, who is deeply interested in his work and tenders him every womanly assistance, despite her family concerns. He discusses the pros and cons of discovering a suitable orphan for adoption by Mr. and Mrs. Boffin with patient interest and conscientious scruples, and his bright and pretty wife, worn by anxiety in connection with schools, soup, flannel, coals, coughs, and all the week-day cares of a large population young and old, shares his interest. Both are as pleased to do so as if they had no wants of their own, but only knew what needs were in the persons of other people.

The Rev. Frank Milvey's labours amongst the poor induced him to allow himself a great deal of lati-

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tude in the matter of rubrics and articles of religion. His expensive classical education availed him little in this ministry: the Oxford manner and drawl would here be—as it has been so satirically described—as if God Almighty were addressing beetles. The sermonising attitude of mind which seeks to minister to the wicked by verse or apothegm—of which Chadband is the burlesque—would be like raining the aphorisms of Marcus Aurelius on rocks. Not one of these scholarly tendencies tainted the patient, whole-hearted parson of the poor. Whether a burial or a wedding, charity, consolation, or counsel spiritual or worldly, it was an office tendered in the spirit of simple humanity and self-effacement. Rubric, article of faith, or any obtruding formalism, were all out of place. In the burial of the little orphan Johnny, or his grandmother, good Betty Higden, he did not ask whether the “office ensuing” was for the baptised or unbaptised, or whether it was for Jew or Gentile, atheist or godly, poor or well-to-do. Need alone was the criterion of his ministrations, frailty the lode-stone. His people: he knew them all; and he knew them in the simple terms of our common life and our common humanity. Like the lamenting “Sloppy” and his turnings of Betty’s mangle, they were all comforted in the spirit that “the best of us were more or less remiss in our turnings at our respective mangles—some of us very much so—and how we were all of us a halting, failing, feeble, and inconstant crew.”

As against the mistaken notion that Dickens was too prone to caricature the parson and thus bring irreverent reflections to bear upon the cleric, and religion generally, we may select the fine outstanding figure of the Rev. Septimus Crisparkle. A correct view of this type of vigorous muscular Christianity will at once take the edge off the old but still too frequent criticism, and the con-

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trast with those of the Chadband class will once more serve to soften and mitigate any offensiveness which some delineations may give to certain sensitive readers.

In view of the fact that it was Dickens's custom to choose carefully the names of his personages to accord with their portraiture, we may at once surmise that we are to be introduced to a bright, pleasant, breezy, and natural person. And the Minor Canon of Cloisterham Cathedral is all this, and more. Dickens's apt way of placing his characters against a suitable background is again well illustrated. We hear the rich and mellow chimes of the cathedral clock vibrate through this quiet and serene atmosphere as if it were the spiritual voice of its brooding solemnity. We hear it echo through the mediæval towers, archways, tombs, cloisters, and the quaint old residences. We mark the passing to and fro of both lay and clerical people who live within these calm and hallowed environs. Their grave yet cheerful demeanour seems to partake of the peaceful affinities of these smiling gardens and smooth lawns as something apart from the ruffled work-a-day world outside.

Dickens frequently lets his exquisite fancy play around the physical surroundings of his characters. In *Edwin Drood*, the sacred and placid air of the cathedral precincts serves the double purpose of both ironic contrast and sympathetic consonance. John Jasper, the choir-master, with his secret opium habit and sinister, mysterious traits, is in ironic contrast. Our pleasant, athletic, and truly humanistic parson is in sympathetic consonance. We enter his simple, bright, and genteel home, and we are introduced to his mother, a pretty calm, bright-eyed elderly lady, like a Dresden china shepherdess on the ample old-fashioned chimneypiece. We are at once in the presence of homely, wholesome contentment, and the spirit of all charitableness and for-

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bearance. The Minor Canon has been feinting and dodging at the looking-glass with boxing gloves, and the reflection is of a man of fair and rosy complexion, hitting out from the shoulder with the utmost artfulness and the utmost straightness; his radiant features sparkling with fresh innocence and soft-hearted benevolence. He is an early riser; perpetually pitching himself head-foremost in all the deep-running water in the surrounding country; is "musical, classical, cheerful, kind, good-natured, social, contented, and boy-like; . . . lately Coach upon the chief Pagan high roads, but since promoted by a patron (grateful for a well-taught son) to his present Christian beat.

"They make a good pair (he and his mother) to sit breakfasting together in Minor Canon Corner, Cloister-ham. For Minor Canon Corner was a quiet place in the shadow of the cathedral, which the cawing of the rooks, the echoing footsteps of rare passers, the sound of the cathedral bell, or the roll of the cathedral organ, seemed to render more quiet than absolute silence." Mediæval monks, who inscribed and illuminated old parchments, or contended with swashbucklers of the old days, once pursued their alternately serene and fighting propensities in Minor Canon Corner. Perhaps one of their highest uses in that they "left behind that blessed air of tranquility," and that "serenely romantic state of the mind which now prevaded there."

It is when we see the Rev. Mr. Crisparkle in contact with the inevitable antagonisms and passions of the world which is not Minor Canon Corner, but which, nevertheless, will penetrate even now to the calm contentment of the Close, that we note and admire his reserve of power, the strength of his tactful humanity, and the fine fibres of his muscular Christianity. The modern conception of

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that familiar type of Christianity seems to have originated here.

To the quiet peaceful home of the Minor Canon is brought a private pupil, one Neville Landless, from Ceylon, a handsome, untamed young man, passionate, but of high moral blood and gentlemanly antecedents. Here is the material for the moulding, and the restrained and penetrative manner of the moulding makes a fine study in the art of the educational potter.

Young Neville's high spirit very shortly gets him into disgrace, and he comes home to his Coach to make honourable confession and to seek consolation under his strong ministering spirit.

“ ‘I have had, sir,’ said young Neville, ‘from my earliest remembrances, to suppress a deadly and bitter hatred. This has made me secret and revengeful. I have been always tyrannically held down by the strong hand. This has driven me in my weakness to the resource of being false and mean. I have been stinted of education, liberty, money, dress, the very necessities of life, the commonest possessions of youth. This has caused me to be utterly wanting in I don't know what conditions, or remembrances, or good instincts. . . . I have nothing further to say, sir, except that you will bear with me and make allowance for me.’

“ ‘Of that, Mr. Neville, you may be sure,’ returned the Minor Canon. ‘I don't preach more than I can help, and I will not repay your confidence with a sermon. But I entreat you to bear in mind very seriously and steadily that if I am to do you any good it can only be with your own assistance, and that you can only render that efficiently by seeking aid from Heaven.’

“ ‘I will try to do my part, sir.’

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“ ‘And, Mr. Neville,’ said the Minor Canon, ‘I will try to do mine. Here is my hand on it. May God bless our endeavours.’ ”

From this moment we see the beautifully sane and gentle Mr. Crisparkle steadily exerting the whole strength of his moral powers and tact in this personal ministry. He starts with the utmost faith and confidence in the young man’s integrity and resources for self-discipline. Implicit in all his intercourse is this unshaken trust and respect: now with delicate reserve, and now with firm directness, he softens and guides the innate strength of this impulsive, passionate, and fiery nature, and in all the entanglements in which the youth becomes involved he keeps steadily to his ministrations. Even when the charge of murder against Neville comes, he remains firm in his ministry and in his faith, and patiently devotes himself to unravelling the mystery which has involved the innocent and unconscious youth in the direst and blackest suspicions.

In contrast with the frank and generous nature of the Minor Canon is that of the mincing and worldly Dean. The time has come when Neville must leave the place. “ ‘Mr. Crisparkle,’ quoth the Dean, ‘human justice may err, but it must act according to its lights. The days of taking sanctuary are past. This young man must not take sanctuary with us.’ ”

“ ‘You mean that he must leave my house, sir?’ ”

“ ‘Mr. Crisparkle,’ returned the prudent Dean, ‘I claim no authority in your house; I merely confer with you on the painful necessity you find yourself under of depriving this young man of the great advantages of your counsel and instruction. . . .’ ”

“ ‘I am entirely satisfied of his perfect innocence, sir, nevertheless.’ ”

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“ ‘We-e-ell,’ said the Dean, in a more confidential tone, and slightly glancing around him. ‘I would not say so generally. Not generally. Enough of suspicion attaches to him to—no, I think I would not say so generally.’ ”

“ Mr. Crisparkle bowed again.

“ ‘I hope you do not object, sir, to my having stated in public emphatically (said the Minor Canon) that he will re-appear here. . . .’ ”

“ ‘Not at all,’ returned the Dean. ‘And yet, do you know, I don’t think,’ (with very nice and neat emphasis on these two words) ‘I *don’t think* I would state it emphatically. State it? Ye-e-es! But not emphatically—No-o-o, I *think* not. In point of fact, Mr. Crisparkle, keeping our hearts warm and our heads cool, we clergy need do nothing emphatically.’ ”

Set also in satiric contrast against the fine, gentle, and thoroughly humane greatness of Mr. Crisparkle, is the big blatant Mr. Luke Honeythunder, who, it will be remembered, was always violently denouncing somebody, and always, as the Minor Canon gently put it, “violently flush of miscreants.” Antagonism to something or somebody coloured his every thought, in private or in public. “Though it was not literally true, as was facetiously charged against him by public unbelievers, he called aloud to his fellow creatures ‘Curse your souls and bodies, come here and be blessed.’ ” Benevolence, peace and good-will, according to Honeythunder, were only to be propagated by violence. Love your neighbour as yourself, but, just within the intervals malign him, and call him bad names; abolish war by making war for your converts; seek universal concord by sweeping off the face of the earth all who will not accord; abolish all evil by malignant aggressive attacks. And above all, organise your benignant propagandists,

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ornament them with a ribbon, and ban all those who do not join, or who dare to pursue any private benevolences. And so on. The irrepressible volubility of the man is like some deafening unleashed storm. Against it, Dickens set the Crisparkle gospel of goodwill and cheeriness, and so the real beauty of holiness is made manifest.

The higher virtues of the good or morally favoured, as practised towards the inferior, too often suffer the blight of condescension; and it is this which divides, rather than unifies. It requires a fine nature and a rare personality to bridge the chasm of moral and class distances. In the Revd. Mr. Crisparkle we see, not merely a type of the true English gentleman which Dickens has been said to neglect, but a type of cleric who can strip himself of the sable trappings of his calling, if needs be, and, pitching head foremost into the troublous waters of human life, as he was wont to do in the weir of Cloisterham, rescue souls in the robust spirit of pure humanity. The picture of his personality is of that spacious and gracious sort, that our regret is not so much that the mystery of Edwin Drood is not solved, but that the development of Crisparkle's place and influence in the plot is not completed and carried to its natural and proper issues. We feel that if Charles Dickens had lived to complete his last story, our interest in, and admiration for, the Minor Canon would have been greater than it is.

“Ye deaf to truth, peruse this parsoned page,
And trust for once a prophet and a priest.”

Dickens's love for cathedral and old-world associations was part of the attraction which Church of England institutions and forms of religion invariably had for him. And this induced him to draw another character from such sources. Dr. Strong was an English scholar and gentleman of the clerical order, besides being the principal

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of a school under the shadow of Canterbury Cathedral. Maybe he does not come so completely within the scope of our "Parson" classification as a minister of religion, like the Revd. Mr. Crisparkle, but he certainly does as a clerical gentleman. He represents, likewise, a type of character which some have said Dickens ignored. To some extent his selection under the present title is quite useful and appropriate. Although Dr. Strong's personality is portrayed with certain weaknesses of character, they are those often associated with the virtues of deep scholarship and studious detachment; and although lacking that robust relation with the world, and that insight into human nature, which characterised Mr. Crisparkle, his school *régime* is depicted as belonging to the best, and his scholars and all round regard him with the highest respect and the deepest affection. His absorption in the construction of a new Greek Dictionary was made, perhaps, the subject of the mildest of satire. Dickens instinctively disliked the classical spirit and traditions of the higher education of his day. As Mr. G. K. Chesterton remarks, "He said "the English middle-class school was the sort of school "where Mr. Creakle sat with his buttered toast and his "cane. Now Dickens had probably never seen any "other kind of school—certainly he had never understood "the systematic State schools in which Arnold had "learnt his lesson. But he saw the cane and the buttered "toast, and he *knew* that it was all wrong." So it comes about, that although Dr. Strong is as wholesomely normal a portrait of a clerical gentleman as is the Rev. Mr. Crisparkle, Dickens cannot resist the sly hit at the Dictionary which was estimated for completion by the Head Boy (himself looking like a young clergyman) in a period of about "one thousand six hundred and "forty-nine years!" But for all that, the Doctor's

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school methods, as well as his scholars, reflect the same principles of ministry that we see in the Rev. Mr. Crisparkle. "He was one of the gentlest of men," said young David Copperfield, "full of amiability and sweetness, and indeed in his whole manner, when the studious pondering frost upon it was got through, was very attractive and hopeful to a young scholar. . . . Dr. Strong's was an excellent school, as different from Mr. Creakle's as good is from evil. It was very gravely and decorously ordered and on a sound system, with an appeal in everything to the honour and good faith of the boys and an avowed intention to rely on their possession of those qualities unless they proved themselves unworthy of it, which worked wonders. We all felt that we had a part in the management of the place and in sustaining its character and dignity. . . . We had noble games out of hours and plenty of liberty, . . . we were spoken of in the town and rarely did any disgrace, by our appearance or manner, to the reputation of Dr. Strong and Dr. Strong's boys."

The point to be accentuated here is, that although, in Mr. Chesterton's view, Dickens may never have seen into such a school as Dr. Strong's, he certainly had the right idea of what they should be. And the basic principle of the control and guidance of the young mind is the same as we see it in the personal and intimate relations between the Rev. Mr. Crisparkle and young Neville Landless—a tender and a gentle recognition of human qualities, and their control and guidance in a spirit of comradeship and equality rather than in a spirit of hectoring pedagogy and superiority. This is the genius of a real human ministry. ✓

There is another Dickens parson of the real good sort, and he appears in that book of buoyant humour and merriment, *Pickwick Papers*, and is himself described as

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the good-humoured and benevolent old clergyman of Dingley Dell, where resides at Manor Farm the stout and hearty Mr. Wardle. As one of the guests at a merry party there he recites "The Ivy Green," and relates the story of "The Convict's Return." The latter will be recalled as a short sketch in Dickens's best and most pathetic style, in which may be well seen a picture of village life and character, with the pastor in his truest rôle of friend and protector to his little community—a friend even to the lowest and most degraded, a true physician of souls and a rescuer of bodies also. The convict was originally condemned to death, but he is received into the haven of the vicarage itself, and "became truly contrite, penitent and humbled, if ever man was." This is an instance where Dickens, even in the days of his most ebullient and merry-making humour, did not neglect the pathetic, the charitable, and even the religious element for part or plot in his stories.

Dickens rarely resorts to psychological analysis in his delineations of character, as do writers like Shakespeare and George Eliot. Shakespeare shows us two Macbeths: the outer one, known to the gracious King Duncan and his subjects; and the inner one, known to Lady Macbeth and the spectator. It is Shakespeare's art to delineate this inner life in all the vividness with which Macbeth realises it himself in his inmost soul, but Dickens's portraiture is generally of the outward man *as the key to the inward*. We meet the Chadbands in modern life, and we know them for what they are. There is, at least, one notable exception, and that is in the case of *George Silverman's Explanation*. There are others, however, like the *Poor Relation's Story*, which partake more or less of this character. The ordinary readers of Dickens, and even the enthusiasts, frequently overlook that many of the finest pieces of polished work are in his short

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stories, and the record of the Rev. George Silverman is one. There, in the fulness of his powers, Dickens portrayed a clerical character which always seems to me, a study in Christian self-analysis and self-effacement—a vivid contrast to his delineations of inflated religious egotism and Pharisaical falsity. In fact, in the same story, instances of the latter are set over against it.

Dickens all his life showed a preference for a rational and humanistic type of Anglican parson, and invariably satirised the pious noise and worldly blend of the evangelicals of the Little Bethel order. The figure of George Silverman is set in this latter environment. The story is a gem of somewhat chill lustre, but polished workmanship, quarried from the slag. George is taken as an orphan boy out of a dark, dirty, fever-ridden cellar, and we get glimpses of the growth of his inner spiritual life as he passes through a series of circumstances, which have all the air of grim reality, up to the time when he becomes a clergyman of the Church of England and tutor to Adelina, daughter of Lady Fareway.

From the first he was a boy of timid, silent reserve and introspective habit. Hustled and harried in degrading poverty, he has the furtive half-human character of Poor Jo, with a single point of self-consciousness implanted by his mother. She is of religious lineage in Little Bethel, although degenerated into want, poverty, dirt, and vice. In this lowered atmosphere there is strangely lodged in the boy's mind the idea that he is "a worldly little devil." His parents die of fever. With no immediate meaning to the child-mind of George, this single spiritual seed lies there, awaiting a Spring that shall quicken it into life. It proves to be the growing point of his soul's awakening, but its influence is a doubtful one; it is received into the soil of an obscure

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religious denomination, and its growth and development makes a special study in Dickensian portraiture.

Brother Verity Hawkyard, a yellow-faced peak-nosed person of prolix oratory and inordinate religious conceit, becomes his guardian. And we discover the character of George's spiritual ancestry: his maternal grandfather was once a brother of their ranting, contortive community of frothing, floor-rolling "brothers and sisters in Christ," of which Brother Hawkyard is the hortative genius.

"Up to this time," explains George, "I had never had the faintest impression of duty. I had no idea that there was anything lovely in life. When I had occasionally slunk up the cellar steps into the streets, and had glared in at shop windows, I had done so with no higher feelings than we may suppose to animate a mangy young dog or wolf-cub. It is equally the fact that I had never been alone, in the sense of holding unselfish converse with myself. I had been solitary enough, but nothing better."

From thence this lonely child-soul passes, with his clouded perceptions, through such scenes as he could compass, always with the ghostly phantoms of "the worldly little devil" to be avoided. One glimpse of a humanising influence comes to him in the boyish love for a girl in the farm-house family where he now lived. Brief as it was, it expanded his little world into the "not-self" for the moment. It did not break the timid habit of introspection which grew under the misconception and misunderstanding of his childish nature—learned from his elders—until in such ways it passed into the retired life of a scholar and a Foundation student.

George Silverman, returning from college, brought with him feelings utterly repellent to the coarse familiar

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worship and blantant preaching of the Hawkyard Bethel. Brother Gimblet's bellowing prayer on one occasion, and his guardian's equally bellowing orations, alike reflected the "worldly" atmosphere which had environed him like a foul vapour from the cellar of his childhood. To them, he was still "the worldly little devil." The fear that debilitates the soul and dreads relapse, that involves the inner life in dire conflict, still haunted him as he approached manhood. This repulsion for the brothers and sisters of the community increased. In their private life they were no better than others: they purveyed short weight in their shops, as they minced truth on their platforms and in their personal intercourses. Spiritually drunken at times, they were only one degree removed from those who were spirituouly in that condition. Their jealousies and malignancies with one another were enwrapped in the froth and unction of religious terms; they back-thrusted at each other in their public prayers and oratory; their coarse familiaries with the Almighty were disgusting to him; their knowing interpretations of the Divine Majesty and Wisdom, as he conceived them, were no less so. He suppressed the rising of mere worldliness within him and entered the Church.

Here he found an atmosphere more congenial and breathable. But his experiences with other-worldliness were no less afflicting to his struggling soul. He came under the patronage of Lady Fareway, a handsome widow of large stature, staring eyes and domineering *aplomb*. She was parsimonious, mercenary and worldly; a shrewish manager where her personal and family interests were concerned. But she presents the Rev. George Silverman to a living, and meanly stipulates for her private secretarial wants, and the tutorship of her daughter. With his other tutorial duties he lives a hard, patient, and ascetic life of immolation, which culminates in such

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sacrificial acts as seem beyond the powers of human bearing. He falls in love with Adelina Fareway, his pupil: his love is reciprocated, although, like his, it is concealed; but the distance of birth and upbringing sets an impassable gulf between them. Then his introspective habit, its associated sense of humility, and the old fear of the taunt of self-interest and worldliness, sting him into a great sacrifice. He yields Adelina to a poor suitor, more in accord with her station of life, if not her wealth. His self-effacement is equal, not only to consenting to marry them secretly, but also to himself divulging the news of the marriage to the stern, self-seeking, society mother. The result, of course, is that he is overwhelmed with reproaches and taunts of worldliness terrible to bear. He is accused of receiving a money bribe; he is even struck in the face in the towering passion of the woman, furious under a sense of being deliberately thwarted; he is stripped of his living, and disgraced with his Bishop. In a word, the abasement of the Revd. George Silverman is, in a worldly sense, complete; but we feel that his spiritual entity is unhurt, except just for the self-centring point round which has gyrated a suffering soul. Then his horizon widens. Those who had known him best, realised that he was incapable of the accusations made against him; and in the end he is presented to a college living in a sequestered place, and so retires in peace and serenity.

This pathetic story is told with all the restraint and severity of a chastened soul in reminiscent repose. It is the story of another Hamlet, whom we realise has taken upon himself a burden unequal to his supersensitive nature. It is a story told without the slightest vice of egoism, and without the smallest sense of martyrdom; yet we feel ourselves in the presence of a real martyr, agonising for a new and better dispensation. As against those who personify the Church's nice adjustment of

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temporalities with spiritualities, like the Dean of Cloisterham, George Silverman becomes a type of comparative purity. Not one complaint escapes him. And we reflect upon those who cannot vilify this life sufficiently to ensure the security of their own unclean and unprofitable lives in the next world; they are the very soil of that religion where false conceptions of worldliness, other-worldliness, sacrifice, and so forth, are grown; they are the mouthing Chadbands, Hawkyards and Gimblets. Like Ibsen's Brand, George Silverman's agony of self-sacrifice is insufficient to kill the dragon which preys upon the people. Self-surrender and self-effacement mean the scrapping of lives—the abandonment and death of high missions which may serve their purpose and take their place in the salvation of the world. There are those who can take complacently the gift of sacrifice, only to subserve the purposes of their own selfish survival. The demand for sacrifice, and the yielding of sacrifice, are alike the produce of the grosser passions and conditions of mankind; they are opposite poles of the same thing: both are resistance to evil by violence, and both are impotent for real progress. They arise out of the riot of spiritual debauchery; they have their real rootage in the economic struggle; they are part of the over-wrought passions of man. In the rational diffusion and equalisation of the common burden, sacrifice is not conceivably necessary, because happiness and progress become universal in the mutual and reciprocal adjustment of human antagonisms. The doctrine of the Brands and the Tolstoys, in its extreme forms, would mean simply the substitution of a spiritual tyranny for a political tyranny. As Mazzini once said, "The French Revolution denied the Catholic dogma of absolute passivity that poisoned the sources of liberty and placed despotism at the head of the social edifice." In a rationally regulated society,

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therefore, the supernatural conception of sacrifice belongs to what may be termed "other-worldliness:" for this life it should become a thing equally shared. As Dickens showed in his delineations of the Revd. Mr. Crisparkle and the Revd. Frank Milvey, a rational "worldliness" is the thing which best ministers to the salvation of souls, and there should then be no call for a new Christ agonising for a spiritual life. If the ethics of self-effacement and self-sacrifice remain true, then the pursuit of holiness, and the pursuit of liberty and happiness will for ever remain a futile quest; for they imply the thralldom of a universal struggle against universal evil.

The George Silvermans and the Frank Milveys are comparatively little known. Dickens is usually judged by the superficial for his Chadband and Stiggins; and, on the evidence of their presentation, he is convicted of having grotesquely assailed "the cloth." Why it should be permissible to lash with scorpions an intolerable type of smooth, bland, and egotistical hypocrisy, when it is found in an architect, like Pecksniff, and not to execrate a sloppy humbug like Chadband, who crawls slimily through a swamp of religious pretentiousness and fraud, one finds it difficult to understand.

From the moment Dickens encountered Chadband he despised him; from the moment we meet him we are intuitively contemptuous of him. Recall how he appears. He has insinuated himself into the household of the timid, meek Mr. Snagsby, the law stationer of Cook's Court, Cursitor Street, whose shrewish wife with her compressed waist, and her nose like a sharp autumn evening, is, curiously enough, an easy prey to his slobbering suavities and his sinister motives. Like a barnacle, he fixes himself upon this domestic vessel; and, opening his mouth like a fat oyster, he feeds himself with unctuous phrases and the lavish fare of Mrs. Snagsby's board.

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Mr. Chadband is "in the ministry"; and in the presence of the best tea-service, dainty new bread, crusty twists, cool fresh butter, thin slices of ham, tongue, and German sausage, delicate little rows of anchovies, nestling in parsley, not to mention new-laid eggs and hot buttered toast, his mouth fills with the froth that favours alike digestion and elocution; and, elevating a large fat hand, he delivers himself of a ministering oration which slops off the tongue in a manner we have all heard at times: "My friends," says Mr. Chadband, "Peace be on this house! On the master thereof, on the mistress thereof, on the young maidens, and on the young men! My friends, why do I wish for peace? What is peace? Is it war? No. Is it strife? No. Is it lovely and gentle, and beautiful and pleasant, and serene and joyful? O, yes! Therefore, my friends, I wish for peace upon you and upon yours!"

This parody of a certain kind of evangelical utterance is delicious. By itself it is positively delightful, and sets forth in vivid clearness both the inner and outer seeming of the hypocrite, always in the silvery light of a truly comic setting. It seems quite superfluous to bear any testimony to the accuracy of that picture to real life. Who, at one time or another, has not been revolted by the same sort of insipid, inane, lip-framing froth—the same tripping and trolling of the mere husk of some so-called spiritual homily? And who, that is observant, has not seen listless mothers'-meeting *habitués*, both male and female, submit themselves, like Mrs. Snagsby, to the same stealthy buttering of the spiritual parsnips? It has always been a matter for unspeakable satisfaction that Dickens should have convicted Chadband of that most loathsome and odious of all forms of moral delinquency and coarse treachery—the blackmailing of Sir Leicester Dedlock.

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Stiggins, as a parson, is not comparable with Chadband. He is a low-comedy type of being and his actions are all stagey and farcical; he is an unmitigated drunkard and a parasitic *gourmand*, battenning on the weak-minded bounty of Mrs. Susan Weller at the Marquis of Granby. There he sits and drinks hot pine-apple rum and water with sliced lemon, and comfortably gorges hot toast at her fire-side in the absence of her stout, plethoric, yet knowing husband, Tony Weller, one of the great-coated stage coachmen of the old coaching days. Like Chadband he cants; but it is in a style far below the magnificent and grandiloquent manner of that quite superior and superlative humbug. Chadband would suffer the severest qualms of conscience if he were ever discovered "overtaken": he would never go to meeting drunk, as "the shepherd" did; it would entirely ruin his reputation for hortative oratory and his powers of personal ministry. He is a consumer of coffee and tea, and all Epicurean delicacies, wholesale. He is, in fact, a true

" . . . Spiritual hedger
" Who backs his rigid Sabbath, so to speak,
" Against the wicked rennant of the week—
" A saving bet against his sinful bias.
" 'Rogue that I am,' he whispers to himself,
" 'I lie, I cheat—do anything for pelf—
" 'But who on earth can say I am not pious?'"

On the other hand, Stiggins is an abandoned, bibulous hanger-on amongst women of listless, lolling piety. He goes to a temperance meeting and insults and flouts it in his cups; he cuts a grossly comic figure, and is a fit subject for the castigation which he gets and takes, like the comic drunken clout that he is; he is without a rag of religious dignity. Chadband, on the contrary, enwraps himself in a mantle of comparatively superb distinction, as in a holy garment. And he never trips over it. Even when Bucket the detective arrests him for blackmail, he gracefully orates—the usual train-oil oration. But Stiggins cuts an altogether different figure.

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He carries a red visage; also a green umbrella—a saggy, columnar ruin; he gesticulates with the old familiar John-L.-Toole gloves—old faded beavers, with protrusive fingers, thrust through their gaping ends; he wears scant sables; is dishevelled at the cravat, and abbreviated in the trousers; his looks are starched, while his clothes and manner are limp, and comically unpicturesque.

Gissing thought these two types were the same man, with a difference of date. But Gissing's sense of humour, generally so discriminative, was surely faulty here. Stiggins never fails to provoke hilarity; his stalking, muzzy manner, with his weak, nerveless intervals of "bestly soberness," keep him always in the realm of the purely comic. There is a collection of thirty-two slang terms in *Household Words* which might be nearly all applied to his tippling habits and manner. But Chadband! Oh no, he was never "groggy"! It would never become him! It is clear that in Chadband and Stiggins we have two distinct types of characterisation. One may be termed "low" comedy, the other "high" comedy.

The Revd. Melchisedech Howler is a parson who is not given what may be called a full length portrait. Like the Revd. Alfred Feeder, M^f.A., he is introduced into a chapter of humour which is "chiefly matrimonial." And this reminds us of another piece of matrimonial humour in one of the *Sketches*, "A Passage in the Life of Mr. Watkins Tottle," where the shrewd and worldly Revd. Charles Timson carries off a bride under the very noses of those who thought they had got the spinster lady safely on the verge of marriage. Truly a matrimonial sketch of rare fun! The Revd. Melchisedech Howler's introduction into *Dombey and Son* becomes, however, part of a piece of farcical humour which is deliciously conceived. The simple hearted Captain Cuttle is the unconscious instru-

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ment whereby his most admired friend, Captain Jack Bunsby, is entrapped into marriage. Bunsby is the very picture of hard-headed, silent sagacity: his weather-worn countenance is as of mahogany, a veritable bulk-head, with one stationary eye in it, directed far off to Greenland; he has a power of intellect, and a dumb, sagacious reserve. Mrs. MacStinger, Captain Cuttle's landlady, is a virago with a family: she is, moreover, a catch-as-catch-can widow. The mahogany Captain with the dead-eye falls a victim to this vixenish creature, to the sympathetic consternation of the dear old hook-handed Captain Cuttle. And the scene of this compulsory marriage is set in a delightfully ludicrous key: it takes place at the lady's conventicle, the Revd. Melchisedech Howler, a ranting parson, presiding at the ceremony. Although his share in the whole story is not so prominent as other of Dickens's parsons, his portrait is hit off in such satiric style as is well worth quoting here:—

“Mrs. MacStinger resorted to a great distance every Sunday morning to attend the ministry of the Revd. Melchisedech Howler, who, having been one day discharged from the West India Docks on a false suspicion (got up expressly against him by the general enemy) of screwing gimlets into puncheons, and applying his lips to the orifice, had announced the destruction of the world for that day two years, at ten in the morning, and opened a front parlour for the reception of ladies and gentlemen of the ranting persuasion, upon whom, on the first occasion of their assemblage the admonitions of the Reverend Melchisedech had produced so powerful an effect, that in their rapturous performance of a sacred jig, which closed the service, the whole flock broke through into a kitchen below and disabled a mangle belonging to one of the fold.”

The more closely this range of clerical portraiture is examined the more clear becomes the deep moral purpose

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of Dickens. He "laughed, and the world laughed with him," at the stupid figures cut by these pretenders to holiness. Metaphorically speaking he slew them with the perfection of power and the vivacity of truth; but he perceived, nevertheless, and constantly insisted throughout that life of his—so full of sap and savour—that true Christian endeavour is social endeavour. He saw that the Hawkyards, the Gimblets, the Chadbands, are the mere exemplars of the sermonising attitude of mind: they do not feel the deep signifi-ance, or the realities of moral and spiritual fervour. Of course they itch to cant it, and they teach poisonous perversions of religious doctrine; but as against their pious noise and egotisms he sets the rational and selfless Crisparkles and Milveys. These are the embodiment of Dickens's own large-hearted sympathy for the struggling poor. They are the reflection and the replica of his own determination to accomplish something rationally "worldly" for the rejected and sacrificed of men, and retrieve the disgraces of our learning and our piety. With Burns he would have said:—

"My son, these maxims make a rule,
And lump them aye thegither.
The *Rigid Righteous* is a fool,
The *Rigid Wise* anither."

CHAPTER XII.

THE FEASTS.

“It was a dinner to provoke an appetite. . . . The rarest dishes, sumptuously cooked and sumptuously served; the choicest fruits; the most exquisite wines innumerable things delicious to the senses of taste, smell, and sight were insinuated into its composition.”

Little Dorrit. Book II. Chapter XII.

It is not at all difficult to explain why Charles Dickens so commonly used the literary device of describing the dish, the banquet, the jolly feast or the homely meal, throughout his writings. In the coach and hackney days the inns of the high road and the taverns of the town were in a very real sense what they mostly are not in our own day—places of true refreshment. The England of Dickens's day knew less of the aggregation of men in great cities; communities were more distinctively those of the countryside; populations and occupations were more particularly of rural colour. The country house was, in a more limited sense the centre and focus of society-life. The great high roads were streaming channels of traffic and intercourse; citizens passed up and down and to and fro in the pursuit of their business. Divers people and *bizarre* personages passed by in stage-coach, hackney, private equipage and on horseback, all in simple and yet animated movement. The post-boys, post-horses, jolly coachmen, the warning coach-horn, the inn-servants, the busy hostelries made the country highways centres of teeming interest, replete with vivacity, vitality and good humour. Mine host was *de jure* and *de facto* a Licensed Victualler. His house was indispensable to the hungry and weary traveller; his fare was a matter of real import-

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ance. This fulness of life involved a corresponding heartiness in indulgence and creature comforts. There was a portentous amount of eating and drinking, and with it an enormous display of good fellowship. It was the Merry England of the *Pickwick Papers*, the England of John Bull before the advanced railway era, and its elements of intermittent personal contact, of intimacy, familiarity and jollity, were such as appealed strongly to the bubbling good-nature of Dickens.

He had a strong personal *penchant* for walking and riding horse-back in company with his friends. In his many excursions of this kind, he seemed always to keep in mind the pleasant goal ahead—the jolly meal with bosom friends at an old comfortable hostelry like Jack Straw's Castle at Hampstead, "memorable for many happy meetings," or "a hard trot of three hours," with the laconic intimation that he would be "heard of at Eel-pie house at Twickenham." He could rarely "resist the good fellowship," and the "red-'ot chop for dinner, and a glass of good wine." Forster's *Life* teems with records of the buoyancy and simple gladness with which Dickens contemplated a feast with his friends.

Dinners, it will be recalled, were arranged to celebrate the close of his stories or stages of them. There was the *Pickwick* dinner, at which he himself presided; the "Nicklebeian fete," as Dickens calls it, at the Albion Hotel, Aldersgate Street, where he and Forster had "had that merry night two years ago," at which Talfourd—"facile and fluent of kindest speech"—and Maclise and Edward Chapman and many other congenial souls were present. There was the *Clock* dinner, "when Talfourd presided and there was much jollity," and when "we all in the greatest good humour glorified each other." Then there was the dinner to him at Greenwich to celebrate the completion of *Chuzzlewit*, a more formal affair, but notable by reason of the fact that Turner, the great

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painter was present and he "had enveloped his throat that sultry summerday in a huge red-belcher handkerchief which nothing would induce him to remove."

The two *Copperfield* banquets were remarkable, because at the first Carlyle drifted in and answered an enquiry as to his health in the famous language of Peggotty's housekeeper, that he was "a lone lorn creature and everything went contrary" with him; the second, because Thackeray and Tennyson both joined the celebration, held, as it was, at the "Star and Garter" at Richmond, overlooking that matchless panorama of the Thames Valley. Forster declares that Dickens was rarely happier than he was that day in the sunshine.

The public festivals which Dickens attended would themselves constitute a separate chapter. This much should be said of them however, that although they were not the kind of feasts in which he revelled—as he did when seated in a low-roofed inn with a few of his old cronies and friends—at least in his public utterances he would bring some of that freedom, some of that absence of restraint, some of that fine rollicking spirit which is essential to the success of every feast. As an example of his exuberant fun may be cited his speech at the Commercial Travellers' dinner, when he avowed we could all discourse upon our comfortable hostelry and "that room on the ground floor . . . not quite free from a certain fragrant smell of tobacco;" that we could all grow eloquent on the comforts these provided for us, with their feasts and fair and feminine deities, the latter having been once described as "eminently gatherable-to-one's-arms sort of persons."

Dickens was very precise as to his own creature comforts when travelling, and we find him even in a remote Highland inn giving the Scotch lassie elaborate and exact direction "for a pint of sherry to be made into a boiling negus, mentioning all the ingredients one by one, and

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particularly nutmeg." The sequel is really worth quoting:—

"When I had quite finished, seeing her obviously bewildered, I said with great gravity, 'Now you know what you're going to order?' 'Oh, yes, sure,' 'What?'—a pause—'Just,' another pause—'Just plenty of *nutbergs!*'"

Dickens never tires, whether he is describing a jolly prairie picnic, an American meal, or a ladies' feast at Lausanne. We even forgive him the supremely exaggerated and over-coloured picture of the dinner at Emile de Girardin's in Paris—"the most wonderful feast ever tasted by mortal"—because of his obviously genuine and generous appreciation.

Who can withstand that amazing narrative of the feast when Guppy and Jobling and young Smallweed dine together? This feast was given by Guppy in what was known as a "Slap-Bang" dining-house, and Dickens's description of it, and the succulent fare it offered, is sufficient to animate even a sluggish appetite.

"Into the dining-house, unaffected by the seductive "show in the window of artificially whitened cauliflowers "and poultry, verdant baskets of peas, coolly blooming "cucumbers and joints ready for the spit, Mr. Smallweed "leads the way." They order "veal and ham and French "beans," (not forgetting the stuffing). "Three pint pots "of half-and-half are superadded. Quickly the waitress "returns, bearing what is apparently a model of the tower "of Babel, but what is really a pile of plates and two "flat dish-covers . . . Then, amid a constant coming "in, and going out, and running about, and a clatter of "crockery, and a rumbling up and down of the machine "which brings the nice cuts from the kitchen, and a "shrill crying for more nice cuts down the speaking pipe, "and a shrill reckoning of the cost of nice cuts that have "been disposed of, and a general flush and steam of hot

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“ joints, cut and uncut, and a considerably heated atmosphere, in which the soiled knives and tablecloths seem to break out spontaneously into eruptions of grease and blotches of beer, the legal triumvirate appease their appetites.”

Mr. Jobling, having been accustomed to spare living, regales himself with a second helping; they renew their pots of beer; they partake of summer cabbage, and call for “ marrow puddings.” Three “ cheshires ” are washed down by “ three small rums.”

It was Guppy's entertainment, but young Smallweed was the cicerone through the labyrinthine wanderings of the *menu*. His elfish precociousness and his owlish ways are somehow irresistibly suggestive of Quilp, in whose characterisation Dickens presented a portraiture of whimsical, quizzical humour, which keeps one perpetually smiling. Guppy, of course, bulks more largely in other episodes. This feast illustrates not so much the type as the manners of the law-clerks of that day, and they are the more vividly presented by reason of this background of the old chop-house cookery, the chink of crockery, the savour of dishes, and the animated service.

Another of the most entertaining feasts, surely, is that when David Copperfield, a precocious child of eight or nine, “ dines ” in fear and trepidation in the large long room of a Yarmouth inn, and is so overpowered by the attentions and stories of the scheming waiter as to the dire and tragic effects of fine sparkling ale, that he permits the artful one to drink it himself and afterwards to demolish the chops and other viands also. It is not a jolly picture, but it is farcical, despite the fact that it leaves one with an impression of watching a pathetic and unresisting little figure travelling like a shorn lamb to the slaughter-house of Mr. “ Tartar ” Creakle.

Some years later David experiences his first dissipation, when he gave that inimitable dinner to Steerforth

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and his friends, and left the *menu* to the initiative of Mrs. Crupp and the resources of a neighbouring cook-shop. It will be recalled how poor David's "mock turtle," which he had purchased in such quantity as to be ample for fifteen persons, so shrunk before serving as to be "a tight fit for four." Then there was the handy young man engaged to serve, who made frequent visits to just outside the door, from whence his shadow always presented itself on the wall of entry, "with a bottle at its mouth!" until in the end he was removed "speechless." And the girl engaged to wash the plates, in her excess of curiosity, did nothing but break them. In spite of these drawbacks they had a merry party; David was singularly cheerful and light-hearted; "all sorts of half-forgotten things to talk about came rushing into my mind and made me hold forth in a most unwonted manner." He laughed heartily at his own jokes and everyone else's, all the time "passing the wine faster and faster yet, starting up with a corkscrew to open more wine." There were incoherent toasts and more or less appropriate songs, and in the end, to put it quite plainly, if vulgarly, David got as drunk as did good little Billie in *Trilby*. It may be a shameful confession; but, like Agnes, we cannot bring ourselves to like David one scintilla the less for that very reprehensible episode!

Martin Chuzzlewit provides us with some historically hilarious festivities, for the simple reason that that arch-hypocrite and dismal humbug, Pecksniff, struts mostly across the stage. Someone once said that the Monument at the top of London Bridge is not so much a reminder of the Great Fire as it is a perpetual tribute to the blessed memory of Mrs. Todgers. Who can forget her jovial brood of lodgers, or the superb occasion when the whole crowd indulged in that Bacchanalian feast, with the unlimited supply of red and white wines and the large

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bowls of punch? Mr. Pecksniff got very inebriated, spilt coffee over his legs, made furious love to the landlady, and had to be carried to bed and locked in his room.

Then there is the ineffable Sairey Gamp, presiding at the tea-party at Mrs. Jonas Chuzzlewit's, and later preparing for that visit to Kingsgate Street, Holborn, of Mrs. Betsey Prig—the historic meeting which resulted in the never-to-be-forgotten quarrel. In that scene, Swinburne used to say, Mrs. Gamp rose to an almost unimaginable supremacy of triumph. There, too, is the earlier scene of gruesome humour, when these two unspeakable “nurses” of that day calmly devoured huge quantities of salmon and cucumber in the chamber of a sick and delirious man at the “Black Bull.”

And what of the homely feasts of Tom Pinch and his sister Ruth? Witness them at the butcher's: “To see him slap the steak before he laid it on the block and give his knife a sharpening was to forget breakfast instantly. It was agreeable too—it really was—to see him cut it off so smooth and juicy. There was nothing savage in the act, although the knife was large and keen; it was a piece of high art. . . . Perhaps the greenest cabbage-leaf ever grown in a garden was wrapped about this steak before it was delivered over to Tom. But the butcher had a sentiment for his business, and knew how to refine upon it. When he saw Tom putting the cabbage-leaf into his pocket awkwardly, he begged to be allowed to do it for him, ‘for meat,’ he said, with some emotion, ‘must be humoured and not drove!’”

Kit's oyster supper in the *Old Curiosity Shop* has often been acclaimed as one of the finest descriptions of real pleasurable enjoyment in English literature. Kit's childish demand for “a pot of beer,” of course, is a fragrant reminiscence of the time when Charles Dickens

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himself made that same demand in a public-house in Parliament Street, Westminster, and received not only two-pennyworth "of the Very Best Ale," but a motherly kiss from the dear old landlady behind the bar. But the oyster supper is redolent of other things than the consumption of the bivalves. The environment of that feast exudes cheeriness, brightness, charm, and simple delight in homely affection. It is a rapid but, nevertheless, an effective and appealing sketch. It provokes broad smiles at the sheer simplicity of the delights of these simple folk, whose good humour turns every trivial thing to fairy-like beauty, but it also tugs at the heart-strings of men by reason of its manifestations of wonderful family affection.

Whenever nowadays we read of the Colchester Oyster Feast, with its costly foregathering of civic magnates and others, our minds invariably revert to that simple little spread "after Astley's," and we find ourselves chanting the chorus of Mr. Gurney Benham's "Oyster Song":—

"Lords and Ladies, Knights and Squires,
Holy Abbots, Priests and Friars,
Aldermen and Bailiffs too,
Councillors in robes of blue.
When you come to think about it,
Isn't this a pattern which might do for you?"

It was the inimitable Sam Weller who declared that Oysters and Poverty always go together. Dickens, at least, appeared to believe that the poor had a readier appreciation of them, at any rate. Compare, for example, Kit's sparkling feast with the air of gloomy invalidity which pervaded the presence of Mrs. Clennam, with her luxurious notions of self-indulgence in puritanical malignities, and her oyster refectations. 'Eleven. Time for your oysters!' remarks Mr. Flintwinch to that lady at the interview where her son pleaded that together they should make reparation for past wrongs. But

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Mrs. Clennam, resolving to treat herself with the greater rigour for having been supposed to be unacquainted with reparation, refused to eat her oysters when they were brought. "They looked tempting; eight in number, " circularly set out on a white plate on a tray covered " with a white napkin, flanked by a slice of buttered " French roll, and a little compact glass of wine and " water; but she resisted all persuasions and sent them " down again—placing the act, to her credit no doubt, in " her Eternal Day Book."

Oysters and partridges were this rigid and darkly passionate creature's invalid regimen, although Dickens gives us a picture of other creature " comforts " proffered daily in that forbidding " home." Precisely at nine o'clock the old woman attendant brought in " a tray on which was a dish of little rusks and a small precise pat of butter, cool, symmetrical, white, and plump." An old man thereafter brought in another tray " on which was the " greater part of a bottle of port wine, . . . a lemon, " a sugar-basin, and a spice-box. With these materials " and the aid of the kettle, he filled a tumbler with a " hot and odorous mixture, measured out and com- " pounded with as much nicety as a physician's prescrip- " tion." It was with this hot port-negus that she habitually fed her soul's religious wrath and hate, revelled secretly in rendering her home a place of austerity and gloom, unpierced in all the years by a ray of real human happiness or the sunlight ripple of healthy laughter.

Dickens's ironic humour never showed itself to greater advantage than in this vivid word-picture of the woman feasting amid this atmosphere of unwholesome dejection, darksome passions, and lurking vengeance.

The feasting in the servants' hall in *Dombey* is always brighter, more mirthful, and invested with a livelier

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vivacity than that which went on upstairs. And who can recall without sheer and positive delight that scene when happy-go-lucky Dick Swiveller entertained the Marchioness to Purl and Polite Conversation? The pathetic, lovable little waif had once "sipped" beer, and so Dick resolved that she should this time *taste* it.

"Mr. Swiveller opened his eyes very wide and appeared thoughtful for a moment, then, bidding the child mind the door until he came back, vanished straight away. Presently he returned, followed by the boy from the public house, who bore in one hand a plate of bread and beef and in the other a great pot, filled with some very fragrant compound, which sent forth a grateful steam, and was indeed choice purl made after a particular recipe which Mr. Swiveller had imparted to the landlord at a period when he was deep in his books and desirous to conciliate his friendship. . . .

"'There,' said Richard, putting the plate before her. 'First of all clear that off, and then you'll see what's next.'

"The small servant needed no second bidding, and the plate was soon empty.

"'Next,' said Dick, handing the purl, 'take a pull at that, but moderate your transports, you know, for you're not used to it. Well, is it good?'

"'Oh, isn't it?' said the small servant."

That was Dick Swiveller's great treat, for he knew the misery of the half-starved child, and had stealthily witnessed her restricted feeding at the hands of the infamous Sally Brass. Besides, she had told him of how she used to pry about at night after the office was closed and the house was settled, to find stray bits of biscuits and "sangwitches" left by Dick, and even pieces of orange to put in water and "make-believe it wine!"

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Dickens was so tenderly sympathetic over this and similar feasts of the poor, that he himself realised the necessity of diluting the pathos of his narrative with considerable quantities of humour, and even farce. The child-slave appeals as irresistibly to us as she did to Swiveller; and Dick's peculiar and jolly humour is used by his creator to cover the serious and kindly regard which he entertained for this plaintive, half-starved little drudge. Were it not for the humour of Sally Brass's forcible feeding in the loneliness of that squalid kitchen, we should have a picture which would repel, by reason of its unrelieved and harrowing ferocity and brutality. Dickens frequently worked in this way. He apparently, of set purpose, tones down the sharp lines of terror and tragedy by dashes of boisterous fun. The source of laughter is akin to that of tears. Dickens knew it, and drew plentifully upon both.

Wherever there was meanness and commonness in human life—especially in regard to feeding people—Dickens poured out unceasingly the lava of his scorching satire. The underfed drudges in small households were his peculiar care. Sally Brass's treatment of the Marchioness was a bitter exposure; similarly, Judy Smallweed's attitude to her little maid designated Charley, was a merciless accusation of the tyranny and buffeting to which domestic slaves were subjected in middle-class homes.

Tom Pinch, within the Pecksniffian domestic circle, was but little better off; and Dickens figuratively rubbed his hands in unrestrained delight when he described the feast which heralded the arrival of young Martin—that spread which quite took away poor Tom's breath. "This "was a banquet; a sort of Lord Mayor's feast in private "life; a something to think of and hold on by "afterwards."

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The same old limitless hilarity and unbounded confidence showed itself whenever he depicted an inn scene. Take that small and ancient roadside inn, called "The Jolly Sandboys," where Nell and her grandfather and the wandering showmen all took shelter on a night of foul weather. Watch the conscious contrast of the misery outside with the cheeriness within! "There was a deep "ruddy blush upon the room and when the landlord "stirred the fire, sending the flames skipping and leaping "up—when he took off the lid of the iron pot and there "rushed out a savoury smell while the bubbling sound "grew deeper and more rich and an unctuous stream "came floating out, hanging in a delicious mist above "their heads—when he did this, Mr. Codlin's heart was "touched."

What dyspeptic exquisite, asks Gissing in his comment on this scene, but must laugh with appetite over such a description?

The criticism that the *Curiosity Shop* is lachrymose is undoubtedly true; but it is only true in the sense that its pages are drenched with the tears of inexhaustible joy.

Pickwick, of course, is one long scream of the happiness of feasting, probably only equalled in its lustiness by the *Christmas Books*. From the Fat Boy, who was mostly being "damned" for falling asleep, and not infrequently for being awake, with his jolly meat-pies and love-making—to Mr. Wardle's banquet of tongue and pigeon pie, and veal and ham, and lobsters and salad, and unstinted wine—to Tony Weller's story of the Methodists "grand tea-drinkin'" party "for a feller they calls their shepherd"—to the shameless flirtations of Sammy in Mr. Muzzle's kitchen—to all the marriage and other festivities which crowd the stories—there is never a moment when Dickens is not making one or another of his characters proclaim the evil of even

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dining in isolation, and the benediction which comes to men when they partake of the good things of life in association with their fellows. *Pickwick* indeed is an epic of shouting, fighting, roystering, drinking philanthropy.

With all that, however, and with all the drinking which marks the characters in other books, to some of which reference has been made, let no one make the stupid error of believing that Dickens excused intemperance. As has already been shown elsewhere, no man had a greater loathing and contempt for excess, no man had a profounder horror of the abuses which had grown out of drunkenness. Forster says that no man advocated and, it should be added, no man practised—temperance with greater earnestness than did Dickens; but he sought deeper down for the causes of intemperance than Drink itself. The drinking in Dickens's pages is always healthy, harmless, and the badge of a strong and virile conviviality.

There is a spirit and a tradition of convivialism in the literary atmosphere of the Victorian era. With Burus it became a weakness. Tennyson loved the relaxation of dining with cronies. With Dickens it was the means of escape from the burden of his manifold activities, connoting, as they did, enormous mental strain. Thackeray relieved his rather brooding melancholy in Epicurean company. It is natural, therefore, that we should find the pleasures of the table reflected in the writings of the two novelists. With Thackeray, they are those of the upper classes. With Dickens, the creature comforts of the common people are the more pronounced; and there is always a charm and a warm glow peculiarly Dickensian.

This reflection of convivialism and the homely splendour of dishes which runs all through Dickens's books, has given rise to the notion that he was self-indulgent in eating and drinking; that he was a convivialist and

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a *gourmand*. It has been said that Tennyson could only write his best poetry when under the narcotic stimulus of a certain tobacco. Coleridge and De Quincey stand self-confessed of opium; and it has been suggested that Dickens's magnificent imagination and fancy was influenced by alcoholic stimulus; that the grotesque imagery and the thousand and one eccentricities of his novels could only be evoked by the aid of spirituous indulgence. All such notions emanate from uninformed or Puritanical sources. They are the muddy emanations of dull wits, which, themselves, never experiencing the warmth and fervour of the emotional, imagine the existence of vices where none are present.

As a matter of fact, although Dickens knew how to play upon the whole gamut of our common feelings, and of set purpose created atmospheres of domestic and creature comfort and pleasures, he was far from being personally self-indulgent. His tremendous literary and mental energies would have suffered. And he well knew it. His highly-strung nervous temperament would have become weighted, clogged, and dulled by animal indulgences. And it is well known that, while Thackeray enjoyed public dinners, they were to Dickens generally a fatigue and a penance. Thackeray was brilliant and happy in society. Dickens was often ill at ease, self-conscious and shy. And as for intemperance, in a hundred places in his articles and books does he preach the gospel of temperance as fervently as any propagandist. His most intimate friend and biographer, Forster, constantly indicates that his life-long habits of neatness and orderliness, regularity and abstinence, are utterly at variance with any such accusations.

One of our modern writers, describing Dickens's attitude to Christmas, as it was revealed in *A Christmas Carol*, remarks that the outstanding feature was the

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great furnace of real happiness that glows through it—that great furnace, the heart of Dickens himself.

What feast has been more exquisitely penned in English literature than the Christmas Day dinner at the Cratchits' home? There is not a detail which is not finely portrayed. We know the viands, we smell the tender goose, and see the arrival of the famous pudding; but beyond and above it all we realise the intensity of feeling and domestic love about this simple hearth, as Tiny Tim's active little crutch is heard upon the floor. There is no more ennobling description in our language than that of the little cripple, by that harmonious fire-side, uttering the eternal benediction, "God bless us every one!"

The Chimes is noteworthy for Trotty Veck's tripe dinner, a description in a few pages which reaches right up to the zenith of Dickens's mirth-provoking genius. The sheer delight with which the old man guesses the contents of Meg's basket is infectious. His ecstasy in contemplating the meal he is to have, there, outside the church on a biting cold day, is wonderfully penned; the exulting enthusiasm of his daughter is an ineradicable memory. And yet about that subsequent scene, when poor Toby is reprobated by the meddlesome alderman, Dickens hurled all the fury of his accusing energy, and all the remorseless force of his withering satire. The poor and their simple pleasures in feasts or otherwise were to him sacred, and must be protected from the interfering fussiness of even philanthropic busybodies.

The other Christmas stories call for no extensive comment, although they, too, are replete with instances of the festive board. There is the leg of mutton incident in *The Cricket on the Hearth*; the Christmas supper and wassail in the *Seven Poor Travellers*; whilst *The Holly Tree* is a medley of inns and dishes and feasts, interlarded with quaint fancies for Christmas. *Somebody's Luggage*

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is simply two-pounds-sixteen-and-sixpence-worth of dishes, drinks, and stationery! *The Sketches* provide several kinds of feasts, in which the real Dickensian humour and sheer joy of animal spirits is abundantly manifest.

In fine, the festivities which so constantly adorn the pages of the novelist were the outpouring of that type of peculiarly energetic if Victorian English humour of which Dickens was the living personification. They form the *media* through which a large part of his humour was spread for our delight and edification. They serve their purpose, as an atmosphere in which love and good fellowship may be seen to be born and fostered. They help out his pictures of the simple and slender resources for cheerfulness and good feeling amongst his beloved poor. In a word they make their contribution to the Gospel of cheeriness with which he intended to brighten a sick world. It was the continuous presentation of this element of vigorous and native geniality in his early writings which gave him his first popularity; it is the survival of it, not only in his later books, but in his social intercourse and personal letters, which makes him immortal.

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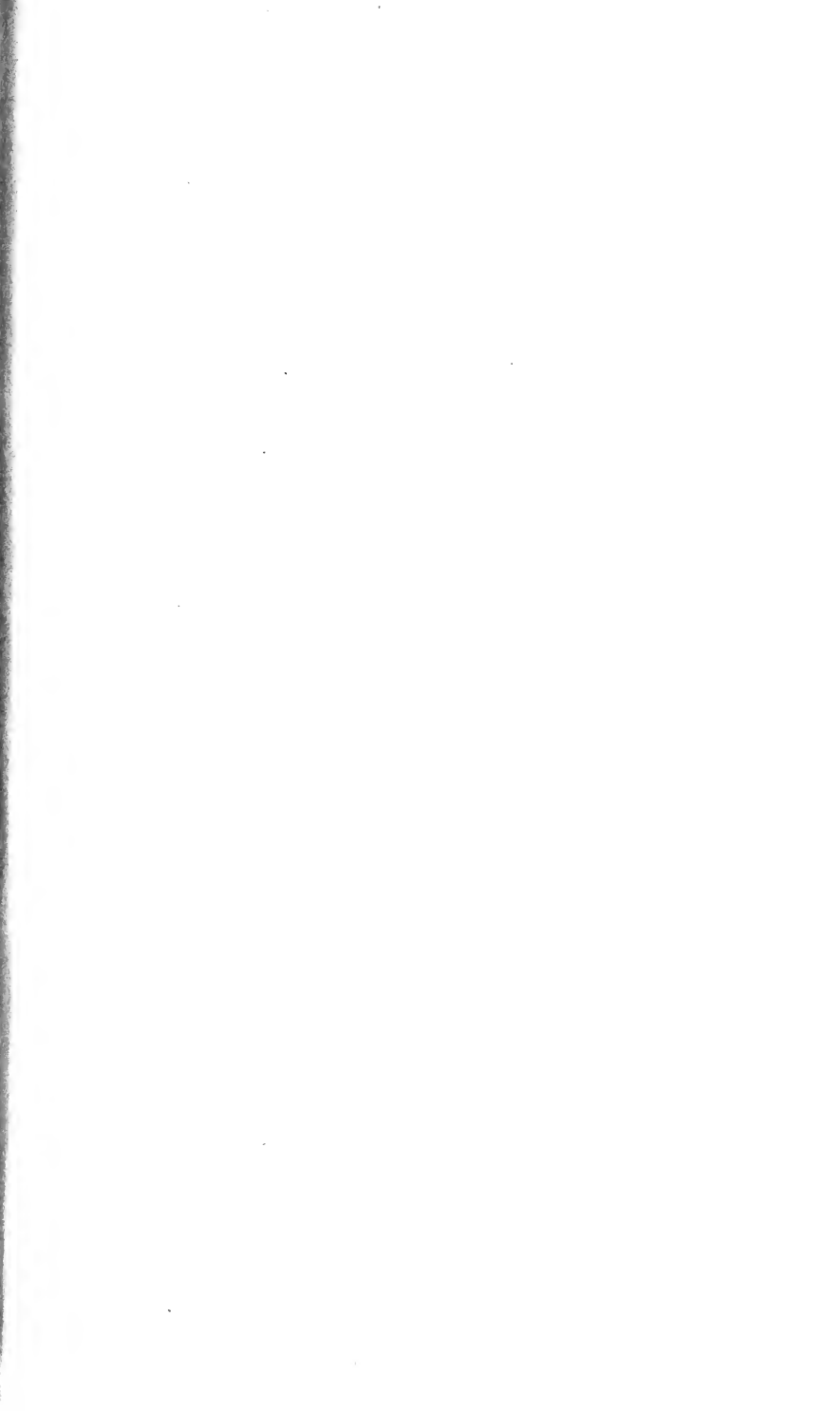
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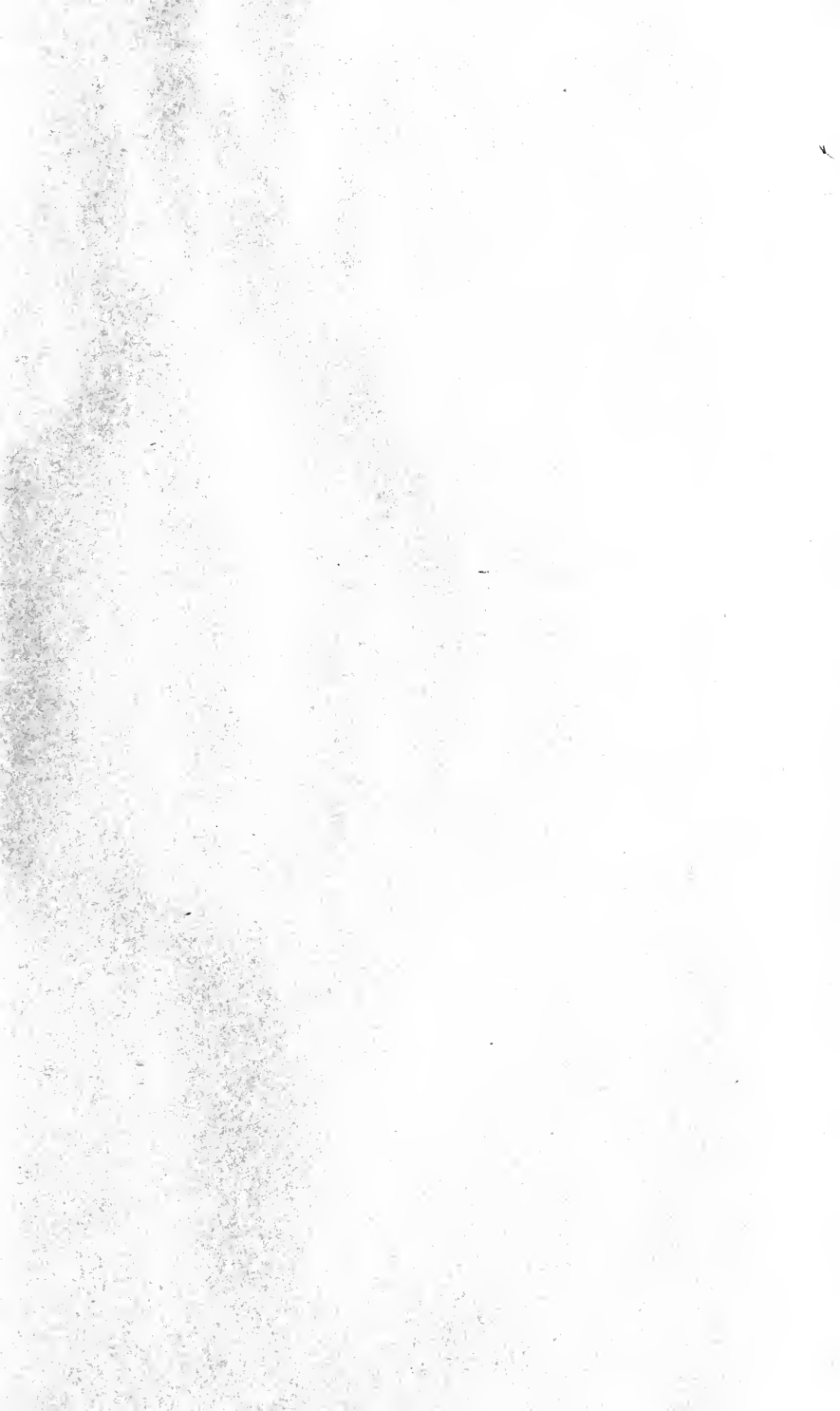
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